

The Final Fight: The 2008 Battle of Sadr City

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Student's Name: Geoffrey Ensby
Faculty Sponsor: Prof John Dietrich
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ABSTRACT

Iraq following the US invasion in March of 2003 was a dangerous place, and one in which the national government struggled to maintain control while unsanctioned and unauthorized strongmen and their militias controlled wide swaths of territory. This analysis will thus look at the 2008 Battle of Sadr City between the militia of radical Shi'ite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr and the military forces of Iraq and the US conducting the operation in concert. Utilizing a number of newspaper accounts and editorials, journal articles, recent books, and freelance journalists' writings, several key aspects will be considered regarding how Iraq was changed for the better. Important elements of the battle to be examined include the perilous power play before the battle between Mr Sadr and Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki as well as the increasing competency of the Iraqi Security Forces. This analysis will also evaluate how additional Coalition military units and newly-developed tactics were employed to effect a combined military and political defeat of Mr Sadr and his private army. Lastly, this is an assessment of the results of the battle, ranging from micro-level impacts on daily life in the area of operations all the way up to the changing nature of US policy in Iraq. At the end of the fight, the Iraqi state came out as the victors, with a stronger popular backing in addition to greater control over much of its territory brought about by breaking the power of these stateless armed groups. More so, the US has been able to begin a drawdown of its presence with the victory by the Iraqis over their extremist menace. In conclusion, the combination of both the soft and the hard power that won over the populace permitted a split between them and the radical fringes of the militias that then became marked for destruction. The achievement of this goal led to a more stable security situation in this tumultuous country and established the state as the sole and preeminent governing authority.

PART I

Build-Up

INTRODUCTION

“Things were going to hell in a handbasket. When I left in 2005, people were complaining more and more about the militia problem, but at the same time there was a drawdown of American forces in the south, which was the real seat of power for the Iraqi government. I remember driving to Karbala in a convoy and being stopped by a supposed Iraqi police unit dressed in green uniforms. I e-mailed General Petraeus to ask if he knew who they were, and he did not know anything about it. It was another new militia, roaming freely.”

-Seth Moulton, former US Marine Corps officer

“Security and politics are, of course, closely intertwined...”

-Michael R Gordon, “The Last Battle,” New York Times, 03 AUG 2008

In the spring of 2008, Iraq underwent a series of major battles in which the nascent Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and their US military allies faced off against the Mahdi Army (Jayesh al-Mahdi or JAM), the personal militia of radical Shi’ite cleric and strongman Moqtada al-Sadr. While this was not the first time the two sides had clashed, it would be in many ways the last major battle in Iraq, not only for Mr Sadr, but also for both the American and Iraqi military forces. This final fight was the proverbial straw that broke the camel’s back, and afterwards, the course of the state of Iraq was irreversibly altered and improved. The power of unofficial militias had been broken under the newly unwavering will of the Iraqi government (IG). Concurrently to this military and subsequently political victory, the populace rejected the thuggish rule put in place by these insurgent elements. In turn, the IG and its agencies gained greater credibility, and the US saw its influence and importance within the nation begin to wane, for the betterment of both entities. As the IG began to rise, agreements were reached that not only eliminated militia power but also permitted the start of a drawdown in US forces (Gordon and Farrell, 2008). Consequently, Iraq stabilized with the demise of armed powers outside of the government’s control, thus allowing the US to begin to disentangle itself from commitments to that country. The battle fought between US and Iraqi forces and insurgent elements of the Mahdi Army led by Moqtada al-Sadr in the spring of 2008 was the definitive force-on-force clash of the conflict, applying the lessons learned to

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effectively combat the insurgency, and leading to a new state of affairs in the country at its conclusion for both the Iraqis and the Americans.

This battle is worth examining in close scrutiny and great detail for a number of reasons, given the impact it has had on both internal Iraqi politics in addition to regional and national foreign affairs, particularly those of the US. One of these is that this event has yet to result in any in-depth academic studies regarding its build-up, participants, or outcomes. Thus, provided the implications it has had on the Iraqi, Middle Eastern, and American politics and security situations, it is necessary to examine how this battle came about, was fought, and ended, in addition to how it has impacted the numerous parties involved. Further, this battle, in addition to the clash that transpired in Basra in the weeks leading up to it, was one of the first significant instances of the ISF being effective and impactful in major military operations. Whereas previous fights had mostly been US-planned, controlled, and led, this was nearly entirely under the purview of Iraqi military commanders. Lastly, this was essentially the last significant clash of the Iraq War that began about five years prior, and was perhaps the, debilitating blow to the fierce insurgency that had raged in the country. The IG not only finally asserted its dominance, but also manifested the means and will to do so. This led to the militias being routed in many ways, not just militarily but politically and even socially as well.

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Importance of the Battle

In terms of material objectives and straightforward results, this battle for the US did not have the same urgency and importance that it did for the IG, as well as the ISF. The US was mainly attempting to assist the ISF as required so that the IG's momentum against the militias could be sustained ("International...", 2008). More so, a successful resolution to this clash would permit smaller US troop contributions and lower levels of assistance in the future, given that the ISF still relied heavily on their American allies ("How...", 2008). Additionally, winning this battle would further pacify Baghdad, ending some of the restiveness that had slowly and painfully bled American soldiers over the previous five years. From there, the US could begin to withdraw its forces from everyday operations, focusing instead on macro-level stability, developing Iraqi military forces, and targeting the most difficult extremists. Thus, ending the reign of Mr Sadr and JAM in Sadr City would speed the drawdown in US forces, since the Iraqis would be proven to be more capable and more readily trusted ("Iraqi...", 2008). The US military in turn could reduce its presence, enabling a reduction in the levels of US military personnel as well as equipment requirements, and lessening political pressures for drastic action back in the States.

The Iraqis had even more at stake in this clash. For them, the very standing and perhaps survival of the IG and the reputation of the ISF could very well have been lost if the Iraqi forces had hesitated or faltered. The US provided aid as required, but only so much as to maintain the progress of this push, and ensure that the mission could be executed all the way through. An end to this battle that left the IG in control and the ISF a respected military entity would only benefit American involvement, allowing the latter the opportunity to unwind its commitments in the country (Biddle et al, 2008). The Iraqis, though, sought to engage and destroy these malevolent forces so that they could finally be known for effectively combating enemies of the state. Consequently, a victory for the IG would establish it as the sole provider of security and stability in the country, leaving no room for question. This void of power that had been pervading Iraqi society enabled the growth of militias and strongmen, such as JAM and Mr Sadr ("Sadr...", 2008). Therefore, the burden now lay on the ISF to remove these cancers and allow the government to take full and complete control ("Rear...", 2008). In sum, a victory in this battle meant far more for the Iraqis, even though it was a more abstruse

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goal. The very ability of the IG to exert its influence without violent and unwarranted pushback from its people would exhibit its dominance, as well as cement its legitimacy.

The biggest winner in this when it was over was the IG, as led by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. The prime minister established his dominance while also strengthening the authority of the state by removing JAM from its position of power and Mr Sadr from his place of influence. Further, Prime Minister Maliki showed to both the Iraqi populace and the rest of the world that the government would not bow to the pressure of its constituents. Also on the winning side were the US and its military, which previously had been impeded and even embarrassed by the Iraqi militias and the lack of intestinal fortitude on the part of the IG. By suppressing the militias, working to win the hearts of and minds of individual Iraqis, and supporting the ISF push, it managed to gain greater credibility as a force of good and not just occupation. On the losing side was Mr Sadr, who lost his bastion of influence, his militia, and much of his standing amongst Iraqis. JAM was dismantled or converted to the mainstream point of view, while the government security forces that it had opposed gained greater stature. Lastly, Mr Sadr, unable to control JAM, no longer was the noble force of American opposition but now perceived by the Iraqi people as a political operative antagonizing both Iraq's and American's leaders to boost his own standing. In their eyes, he seemed more intent on seeking to advance his causes alone without considering what other Iraqis sought.

Research and Methodology

The majority of the research for this effort was conducted by way of newspaper and newsmagazine articles, in addition to some editorials and in-depth analyses in journals, in addition to other media. This other media included several books looking both directly into important aspects of the battle as well as how other matters in Iraq tied into this event. Also, several US government and military reports and publications on Iraq, a CBS report on the battle, and numerous blogs were utilized. Lastly, and very important to note, is that the majority of these sources were from Western, mainly American content producers and providers. As such, foreign media and local perspectives were lacking not so much because they were viewed as untrustworthy but rather due to both the difficulty in finding them and challenge of understanding them, due mainly to the language barrier.

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Among the most examined sources were written pieces from the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *Washington Times*, in addition to the a few articles from the *Economist*. All of these publications provided both micro-level accounts of individual happenings as well as more macro-level appraisals on how the battle was affected by and influenced the course of events in Iraq. Additionally, a report from the program *60 Minutes* was employed as a source as it covered, in great depth, the technology that the US military brought to bear during the battle. Moreover, multiple blogs from both newspaper reporters and independent freelance journalists provided supplemental perspectives on the battle, especially in regards to how the population of Sadr City reacted to the fighting. Though these sources are sometimes of questionable quality and legitimacy, these proved to be valuable resources, and had no major discrepancies compared to other assessments of the battle.

One of the most important aspects to consider when looking at this battle is the timeliness, accuracy, and coverage of the sources. Since it is such a recent event, there are no major academic studies that have been conducted on it. Furthermore, most of the resources that are existent generally are first-person or second-person accounts, written shortly after the occurrences being described. While there have been some good editorial analyses of the battle, no major and comprehensive study has been completed thus far. Consequently, looking at such an event such as this clash so soon after it transpired brought forth both advantages through ease of access to sources and difficulty in looking at conclusions since little research has been conducted as of yet. While on one hand, there are a great many first-hand accounts and journalistic reports, there are no definitive journal articles or academic works composed. However, the ability to compare and contrast the writings presented in many different newspapers and newsmagazines allows one to gain an objective and clear view on the happenings. Therefore, the opportunity to execute one of the first in-depth evaluations of this important battle is exciting as much as it is challenging. In the end, this analysis should hopefully identify and clarify the background to the clash, as well as the major features of it that are noteworthy and worth discussing. Lastly, this work should show how the battle has shaped Iraq and impacted the US, the IG and ISF, and the militias and their leaders, as well as other repercussions that have been noted.

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This analysis will look at this event and the effects that it had on Iraq in five parts. First, there will be a look at the factors leading up the clash and how they laid the groundwork for the battle so as to see how the fight came about. Next, two sets of descriptions of the participants of the battle, analyzing the capabilities and limitations of the Mr Sadr and his minions and the Iraqi and US military forces, will be added to show how their abilities and deficiencies affected the operations. An evaluation of the tactics, techniques, and procedures of the warring parties will be undertaken to show how these different methods of fighting brought about the battle's result will be included as well. Lastly, an examination of the conclusion of the battle and what it means for Iraq, as well as the new state of affairs that emerged, will wrap-up the study. This portion will serve to scrutinize how the US and Iraqi policymakers adapted their methods to fit the situation, and lessons that can be learned from this situation and thus applied to future conflicts.

BACKGROUND TO THE BATTLE AND LEAD-UP

“Sadr himself remains a popular figure among Iraq's downtrodden Shiite communities, if only because of his family ties and perceived nationalism. But he appears increasingly out of step with his erstwhile constituents. His long sojourn in Iran has removed him from day-to-day management of his movement and weakened his nationalist credentials.”

-Stephen Biddle, Michael E O'Hanlon, Kenneth M Pollack, “How to Leave a Stable Iraq- Building on Progress,” Foreign Affairs, SEP / OCT 2008

The convoluted history of Iraq tells much in regards to how the clash manifested, despite all of the haze and uncertainty surrounding the fight. Mr Sadr did not come to be an important figure in Iraq overnight, nor did Sadr City instantly spring up as hotbed of anti-American sentiment. Neither did Shia militias form on whim; instead, there were reasons as to why each of these important factors in the battle manifested. As a result, events in Iraq were not the only impetus for this clash, as the overarching US strategy for this war had transformed from the original way of waging battle rooted in past wars to a new policy reflective of the conflict transpiring in Iraq. Prior to late 2006 and early 2007, the US had viewed the war as a black and white, force-on-force fight similar to the Gulf War of the early 1990s. In turn, plans were in this vein, and had considered neither the effects of congested urban warfare nor the presence and impact of the civilian populace. Fighters were not just of one group in uniform but could very well be everybody. Consequently, US military philosophy had to change, or else the war would devolve in an extraordinarily unsatisfactory manner.

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Sadr City

Sadr City, originally known as Saddam City during the times of that despot, came into being in the late 1950s, as President Abdel Kerim Qassim started a construction project in east Baghdad. This project, which was first known as al-Thawra before its two later name changes, was built in order to house poor Shiites (Cockburn, 33). It is often, incorrectly, viewed by many as just another part of Baghdad; however, its size and unique culture really make another city within the capital. This is the case since somewhere between two and three million Iraqis call the district home (Cockburn, 33 & 142; Kitfield, 2008; “Sadr...,” 2008; Londono- “Maliki...,” 2008). Even as Mr Sadr took over the district and led to it being renamed once again, the place was known for a squalid existence, though not at the same level as what one may expect. David Enders, writing in *Progressive* magazine in 2008, wrote that “it is not so bad. There is some running water and electricity and most of the standing piles of sewage that were common four years ago are gone” (Enders, 2008). Still, there are millions of people crammed into a space of just 25 square kilometers and, “piles of trash littered the streets, which was charred in patches from burning tires” (“Rear...,” 2008; Raghavan- “19...,” 2008). Either way, though, the conditions as well as its state helped to both fuel the residents’ disdain for the IG and to an extent dissuade the US military and ISF from entering. This was the case given the peril urban conflict brings forth, especially in this type of setting.

Sadr City is viewed as the “worst-case scenario in urban warfare,” where “there are often no clear lines and militias still roam the narrow side streets” (Gordon- “As...,” 2008). This is how it is aptly depicted given its cramped, complex, convoluted layout and incredible density of its population. It is further painted as being “a slum-metropolis of low concrete buildings and apartment blocks within Baghdad, with streets full of trash and excrement, a maze of alleyways” (Kitfield, 2008). As such, the neighborhood is a nightmare for US forces since so much of the US military’s advantages lies in its armored mobility and heavy firepower, which are not at all well suited for this type of fighting. Instead, these assets are greatly marginalized by the tight confines of this place and the concerns about the unbearable effects of collateral damage on people and property. More so, since the US military has been trained to fight a bilateral battle with defined, distinct combatants in clear circumstances, this is the

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polar opposite. The enemy is nearly everywhere, while the civilian population is interspersed amongst them, some helping, others hiding, most cowering in fear (Al-Taiee & Dagher, 2008). In turn, the US, which generally has tried to stay out of these types of fights, brought into play its new tactics that it had developed over the previous five years of conflict. Though the general environment had not changed, the US had created methods by which some of the risk inherent in fighting in this potential deathtrap had been mitigated.

Sadr City became, after the fall of Mr Hussein, the private and undisputed lair of Mr Sadr. This new situation was described as one in which the radical cleric was “very close to establishing a state within a state inside Iraq, much like Hezbollah...in Lebanon.” In this little fiefdom, Mr Sadr established his militia and took over many civic and even governmental functions, going so far as to create his own judicial system. While this may seem incomprehensible given the pervasive presence of foreign military might in Iraqi during the 2003 to 2008 time period, Baghdad had been pretty much left to its own devices, so Mr Sadr had free reign. At the same time, US and other military units were loath to enter into this pit of vipers, given the casualties suffered and stress incurred when venturing into other urban strongholds ruled by insurgents and their militant leaders, such as Fallujah in 2004. In turn, paradise would be lost for these entities once the US moved forward with its surge and new COIN strategy starting in 2007 (Senor et al, 2008). The IG could not sustain itself, nor could the US military be able to pull out of Iraq if it could not eliminate this dire threat subverting the state.

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A Brief Overview of Iraqi History, Culture, and Society

This battle must be examined in the context of the five years preceding it and in light of the many issues that arose. These difficulties worked to stifle progress in Iraq and baffle American military, diplomatic, and political leaders, while giving rise to Mr Sadr resulted from a misunderstanding of how Iraq works (Ricks, 156; West, 60). Iraq, quite simply, and what should have been rather obvious, is not a traditional Judeo-Christian, Enlightenment-fueled democratic society. Instead, it is a conglomeration of tribes with their distinct histories and unique religious concepts mashed together during colonial times and governed as far back as can be recorded by dictatorial strongmen. Thus, it is not a place that would be likely candidate for the Jeffersonian democracy preached by Western powers, namely the US. Without taking into account this great divide, those attempting to stimulate the establishment of a free society with an open government will be stymied. As such, one must instead realize that this will not work as predicted, and subsequently must adjust to meet this situation (Cockburn, 148). Forcing one's concepts and ideals upon a dissimilar society will only lead to push-back and even open revolt; instead, one must adapt to the circumstances.

When the US first attempted to clear this area of Baghdad in April 2004, eight soldiers lost their lives and dozens were injured, while the US pulled back. It did not return in force, choosing instead generally to ignore the district, focusing on other areas in Iraq (Shadid, 2004). This type of policy would prove to be the bane of US counterinsurgency (COIN) tactics during the next three years. As American military forces moved out of an area, they either completely abandoned it to its own devices or pulled back, assuming that the ISF could cover. This did not prove to be the case, as the insurgents slipped right in and took control as the ISF often failed to hold its ground and subsequently left as well. As this vacuum was formed, the insurgency could build its strength, and support among the populace, in these new bastions, which in turn powered their influence and reach. Seth Moulton, a former Marine infantry officer observed, "Time and again I watched as American forces drew down, and militias blossomed in the resulting power vacuum" (Moulton, 2008). Consequently, the US only dug itself a deeper hole by not maintaining a presence in these areas, which later necessitated this battle.

PART II

The Threat to Iraq

MOQTADA AL-SADR

“I have failed to liberate Iraq, and transform its society into an Islamic society.”

-Moqtada al-Sadr, Asharq Al Awsat newspaper, March 8, 2008

Biographical Information

Mr Sadr is a man with a history of violence, both in his lineage and in his own lifetime, not only of the intent of others but also of his own doing (Ricks, 156). It is important to realize that Mr Sadr views himself as the continuation of a great line of Shia leaders oppressed by malevolent powers, since his own history involves the deaths of his father and cousin. This tragic lineage was lanced during the Hussein regime-era repression and persecutions of the Sunni political, religious, and social foil, the Shi'ite population of Iraq (Cockburn, 114). The cleric was born in 1974 to one of the most famous and honored Shi'ite religious leaders, Sayyid Moqtada Sadr, who was later assassinated by the former leader of Iraq, Saddam Hussein. Opposed to the reign of Mr Hussein, the elder Sadr was killed, along with two of Mr Sadr's brothers. This was not the first death to rock the Sadr clan, when another religious leader, Grand Ayatollah Mohammed Bakr al-Sadr was tortured and subsequently killed by Mr Hussein in 1980 as well. Thus, Mr Sadr had great standing in the eyes of the Shi'ite population of Iraq, given that he was the son and son-in-law respectively of “the two great martyrs in the modern history of the Shia” (Cockburn, 114). This asset would help fuel his movement and attract supporters in this religious nation.

Subsequently, the US invasion of 2003 presented him with the opportunity to employ this storehouse of respect and direct the fervent following of many of Iraqi Shi'ite population to oppose the American efforts (West, 61). Anthony H Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies presaged this conflict when looking at the Iraqi intra-national power struggles, saying that:

“Much will depend on Sadr and whether his growing attacks on the US for supporting Maliki have pushed him toward open confrontation with the

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US...What is clear is that the intra-Shiite power struggle has only begun, will be violent to some degree, and is likely to intensify.” (Gordon- “Attacks...,” 2008)

Viewing this occurrence as his chance to implant himself in the pantheon of legendary Shia, he quickly moved to make himself known as the key opponent of the US’s policies. He then sought to lead much of the Shia resistance to the supposed American occupation, viewing such activity as his *raison d’être* (“The Shia...,” 2008; Paley- “Sadr...,” 2008). He saw the power void in Iraq, understood the potential for enhancing his stature and gaining control over a historically significant area, and moved to ruthlessly and relentlessly exploit this opportunity. Mr Sadr was striving for the hearts and minds of ordinary Iraqis, hoping to become, if not really an official leader, at least the accepted face of the population. Prime Minister Maliki, on the other hand, was seeking to establish the supremacy and legitimacy of the newly-formed IG, but would only be able to do so if he won over the people.

Mr Sadr was not seeking the disintegration of Iraq, but rather an arrangement in which the Shia ruled and the Sunnis submitted. More so, in his ideal world, the Americans would be nowhere to be found, either physically present or in terms of political meddling in the country (“The Shia...,” 2008). Further, in all of this, American military and political experts never really realized just how important, and how ingrained, Mr Sadr was in Iraqi society. He was noted for maintaining an incredibly devout and zealous following, and one that harbored a deep, impassioned hatred of the US. Whereas some Iraqis only feared the Americans overstaying their welcome, Mr Sadr scorned the US as “the bigger devil,” having replaced “the smaller devil,” Mr Hussein, the scourge of his own family (Cockburn, 134). He also had this canny ability to incite the masses, but as would be painfully realized, he had even more difficulty in controlling them. Patrick Cockburn, a distinguished British journalist expert on Iraq, summarized this problem in his book *Muqtada* quite succinctly:

“It was the strength of Muqtada that he could mobilize the masses, the millions of angry and very poor young men whom nobody else in Iraq represented. His weakness was the he could not control them, and he knew the risk of being denigrated as a dangerous and destructive trouble-making.” (Cockburn, 148)

Soon, he turned to violence, in a desperate effort to force out the perceived army of occupation, moving from political methods to the military measures to drive out his enemy

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(Cockburn, 165). When his militia went out of control, though, his own downward spiral from power began as well. This was the case since JAM was now a greater and more dangerous enemy to the Iraqi people than the US or IG would be to them.

The new pugilism exhibited by Mr Sadr was not surprising, as he had rattled his saber and even initiated several battles before 2008. This belligerence started in 2004 as US forces moved to secure Iraq and then again in 2006 when sectarian, religious violence erupted yet again after the bombing of the Golden Mosque at the sacred Shia Askariya Shrine in Samarra (al-Hakeem, 2008). In all these previous actions, the cleric demonstrated:

“A keen instinct for the swift tactical retreat when confronting an opponent of superior strength, [which would] prove essential for this survival.” (Cockburn, 137)

Also, as Mr Cockburn noted, Sadr “survived, but he had come close enough to defeat to be wary of fighting the US Army for a third time” (Cockburn, 162). He had escaped before, though often with the help of government deals that stopped the fighting in return for his life and liberty (West, 239). Now he realized that his power was waning, and he had to regain momentum for his movement back from the IG. So he started waging battle after battle against the American and Iraqi militaries in a futile attempt to stop this trend. In contrast to past clashes, when he had escaped every time defeat seemed imminent, he would not be able to slip away from a determined advance by the IG (Paley- “Sadr...,” 2008). This third clash would soon transpire, and in the end he would not escape unscathed as he had the previous two times when facing off against US and Iraqi military forces.

The Rise of Moqtada al-Sadr

Furthermore, Mr Sadr and JAM continued to grow in strength and influence, not only in the capital city but throughout the country as well. At first, when the surge of US troops that was implemented in 2007 swept into Baghdad, it bypassed Sadr City. Part of this was due to the fact that JAM was adhering to a cease-fire agreement, formed after a couple of earlier fights. However, this decision was also driven by fears of another bloodbath- a worst-case scenario similar to the terrible fight in Mogadishu, Somalia that US forces were involved in fifteen years earlier (Raghavan et al, 2008). In turn, Mr Sadr and his militia chose not to engage US

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forces, choosing to build up their strength and standing instead. Additionally, although it was a long-stated, well-known, and high-level goal of the US to remove Mr Sadr and his militia from its position of power, it was not possible to do so immediately. Rather, the US military had to wait until the cleric's movement had weakened and also when the IG and its military elements were prepared to wage the protracted fight as well (Cockburn, 178-179 and 191). Speeding the process would involve striving to remove the populace from this destabilizing influence, thus isolating the extremists so that they could either be targeted and destroyed by military forces or turned upon by an angry population. Even better for the US and its Iraqi allies would be a situation in which the people became disenfranchised by the militia, removing their support and leaving Mr Sadr's movement vulnerable to military and political eradication.

Eventually the ice broke and the IG made a move to remove the presence, and influence, of Mr Sadr from Iraqi politics ("How...", 2008). Prime Minister Maliki realized that for the government to sustain, and for him to remain in power, he had to stop the militias before they overpowered the ISF. If this were to happen, he would lose his protection and would have to face the consequences of failing to secure the country. As such, the first operations launched by a newly steadfast government started in March of 2008 in Basra, a southern city that was also a JAM stronghold. JAM saw the threat to its existence, so the militia sought to relieve pressure on comrades in that port city by bringing about trouble in the Sadr City district in Baghdad (Kitfield, 2008). Then the real spark for the battle came when JAM began launching mortars and rockets at the US-controlled and protected Green Zone in central Baghdad in the spring of 2008. As US and other foreign nationals were being killed and maimed by these brutal attacks, American military leaders saw no other choice than to enter Sadr City and interdict these attacks before more lives were lost ("US and...", 2008). In sum, JAM, in many ways, brought about its destruction, invoking the fury of a bloodied US and writing its own sentence.

THE SADR PARTY AND THE MAHDI ARMY (JAM)

“Meanwhile, JAM cadres, increasingly rejected by the Shiite population, which has come to see them more and more as members of predatory criminal gangs rather than as a necessary defense against Sunni attacks, have been routed on the battlefield or driven underground or into Iran. Communities once dependent on JAM now welcome ISF units as sources of law and order.”

-Stephen Biddle, Michael E O'Hanlon, Kenneth M Pollack, "How to Leave a Stable Iraq- Building on Progress," Foreign Affairs, SEP / OCT 2008

Political and Military Wings

Mr Sadr was not just a violent firebrand but also a shrewd political operative, creating a political party to rival the other Shi'ite groups, especially those in power. His eponymous organization was just another means by which he could expand his influence and sway throughout Iraq. Further, this organization was a clever attempt to create legitimacy in the eyes of many Iraqis, given that he added soft-skills to the hard-edged militia he maintained. When the IG failed to meet the expectations of the resident of Sadr City, he immediately jumped in, maligning the government while offering security and stability (O'Neill, 82). More so, he was able to use his clout as the progeny of a revered Shia cleric and devotion to representing the interests of those otherwise marginalized in order to garner a following unlike that of many other leaders. As Iraq fragmented and went to war against itself, destroying what national institutions were left, Mr Sadr and his organization came to the forefront, offering the stability and assistance to the public that the government could not in the tempest (“The Shia...,” 2008; Goode, 2008; Senor et al, 2008). The crowds did nothing but flock to him and his message, as he moved to be the advocate of the underrepresented.

Mr Sadr's rise was aided the creation of the Mahdi Army, or JAM. Estimated in strength at around 10,000 members, this militia was first brought to bear by Mr Sadr on US forces in 2004, as the uprisings in Karbala and Najaf and the first battle of Sadr City erupted (“The Mahdi...,” 2008). These Shi'ite elements again came to the forefront in 2006 following the Sunni bombing of the al-Askari Mosque in 2006, as they launched retaliatory attacks from February until August (Ghosh, 2006). Mr Sadr then called for a cease-fire between the warring sides, one that lasted until the fighting began again in 2008. In between bloodshed, JAM attempted to remake itself more as a civil force, and not so much as a band of military

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men. This break in the fighting also reduced the pressure placed on him by the US military and policymakers, allowing him to stay safely ensconced in Sadr City, where he spewed vehement hatred against the Americans. Furthermore, Sadr's militia was working to remake its military aspects as well, increasing the size and improving the orderliness of their organization and enhancing their war-making abilities by way of new and advanced tactics and tool. At the same time, though, some were moving into more criminal activities to support themselves. This was possible since they had exploited the opportunity stemming from the weak governance by both their own insurgents' leaders and the lack thereof exercised by the IG.

In the Spring of 2008, JAM still controlled and ruled Sadr City. This position was supported by the people, since the militia was thought of highly by many Iraqis, who viewed them as the defender of their interests (Ricks, 167 & 173). In contrast, the other Shi'ite political organizations, as well as the government and its various agencies, were looked at with deep distrust and distaste. One main reason for this loathing was the fact that many people in Iraq viewed the Shia groups in power as covertly using the government to advance their tribal and even personal interests. To them the IG was not a force improving their lives but another tool used to marginalize those not of the right tribe or with the appropriate connections. Therefore, since the government, in their eyes, failed to protect them and enhance their living standards, these shunned groups moved to fight against it. Consequently, the Sadrists slipped easily into this void. In an effort to reduce the pressure on his back from the IG and avoid alienating the people, the Mr Sadr was trying to remake both the reason for and activities of the militia. One Sadr representative painted a vivid and dramatic picture of the bold new direction that Mr Sadr was attempting to take his movement:

“‘We are interested in civic issues more than military issues,’ Said Harith al-Ethani, a Sadr representative in Basra, said in February. ‘We are helping with blood donations; we are providing volunteers for the hospitals; we are handing out gas and food rations,’ he continued, sounding more like an old political machine operative than a religious insurgent.” (Tavernise et al, 2008)

In the place of what was, at the time, an inept government, Mr Sadr's groups worked to fulfill basic governmental functions. However, the IG began to operate constructively and could

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actually meet the needs of its citizens by 2008. Whereas other Iraqis recognized the benefit of uniting to manifest progress in the country, more conservative, reactionary groups such as Sadr's, chose to fight this, to the detriment of their efforts.

Capabilities

Furthermore, the militia members had improved their war-fighting abilities between conflicts, becoming a more hierarchical and ordered unit. As noted by Sudarsan Raghavan in the *Washington Post* while with the militia in Sadr City,

“They said they had woken before dawn to make sure all their fighters were in position. They ordered their men to check all the IEDs they had set and shared intelligence with commanders in other sections of Sadr City.” (Raghavan- “19...,” 2008)

US Army MAJ Mike Humphries backed this analysis, describing how JAM had been operating with surprising, perhaps even startling military precision:

“The Shia militias are used to working in a military manner with senior commanders, and with training sponsored by international forces in Iran. They have a sense of leadership. These guys knew what they were doing. They were launching these rockets from roads that are perfectly lined up to the Green Zone every day... They were very well-trained.” (Totten- “Sadr...,” 2009)

Thus, the US and Iraqi forces were facing a formidable enemy, one far more prepared and ready than in years previous or had been expected. In many ways, the progress JAM had made in bettering its abilities and expanding its war-making capacity was a tragic and frightening indicator of how chaotic Iraq had become. The enemies of the state could openly and blatantly develop and train armed units and bring to bear substantial resources against the government, and all the more astounding, had been allowed to do so. In turn, the challenge now lay in figuring out how to bring this rogue group down so that it could not threaten the authority of the country (O'Neill, 82). Thus, the IG had to take a stand and act to remove this potentially destabilizing force.

A JAM militant confirmed the conclusion that they had grown in stature and capability, stating unequivocally that “It is wrong...to call us a militia; we are an army” (Cockburn, 6). Yet, at the same time, the capabilities that the militia possessed often were either easily

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countered by the advanced Iraqi and US military forces, or were so Pyrrhic in their implementation that the repercussions would eventually be the cause of the militia's demise. The reign of the Sadrists in the district was not characterized by progress and advancement but really by fear and deterioration in living conditions instead. Through all of this, a culture of fear pervaded, as noted by one resident "People are still afraid of the Mahdi Army... You still get punished if you talk bad about them" (Tavernise, 2008). Elements of JAM became uncontrollable, as they started seeking goals not always in line with the interests of distressed Iraqis but ones that were instead focused on pursuing personal advancement. One Iraqi Member of Parliament summarized the difficult situation that the Sadrists has created, saying:

"The Sadrists M.P.'s have a problem persuading their armed people to listen to them... However they have four days of calm, and they will use that time to convince them to stop fighting. We believe that some groups will keep fighting and not observe the cease-fire because they are worried about being arrested." (Gordon & Farrell- "In...", 2008)

It oftentimes used tactics and techniques that, while effective at inducing harm, were just as destructive and regrettable to the general populace as well. This thus became the opportunity to destroy the group and end the reign of its leader, since the people were beginning to feel betrayed. While there was still the basic organization under Mr Sadr's purview, enough offshoot groups with ties and allegiance to but not necessarily controlled by that umbrella entity had formed. These rogue elements had come to view Mr Sadr as not steadfast enough, or had even come under the sway of foreign powers such as Iran and no longer submitted to Mr Sadr and his organization. JAM and Mr Sadr now were not delivering on their promises, and thus they became targets not only to the US military and IG, but to those who had previously supported the Sadrist movement.

A Splintering Organization

As this clash began, though, the US officials began to view the elements involved not as mainstream members of the militia, but as radical elements, with ties closer to the Iranians than most Iraqis. In turn, US policymakers in Iraq sought to drive a wedge between the militia members who could be turned, isolating the extremists while also giving reasons to the population to turn away from the Sadrists. This was the policy that had worked so well throughout the Sunni Awakening movement, in which the US military labored to isolate

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potential fringe elements by bringing the middle into the mainstream. It was possible to win over these moderate fence-sitters, since these tacit supporters are perfectly willing to change allegiances if another party can offer a better arrangement. In this case, the radical elements that had been tormenting the US military and the IG and populace were to be pushed out of society by their fellow tribe members. This was the direct result of these more moderate groups realizing the debilitating danger of the downward spiral that terrorism would manifest, while taking a less hostile stance could yield far greater rewards. Subsequently, the US was able to cast these extremists in a very hostile, cold, critical light, which eased the transition for many Sunnis from outright, often violent, opposition into conciliatory, constructive dialogue and cooperation (Campbell et al, 2008-2009; Chiarelli & Michaelis, 2005; Ghosh, 2006; O'Neill, 82). Thus, the US military had a template from which to work in regards to isolating Sadr's minions, and could now work to drive the wedge between the extremist, criminal elements and the moderates just seeking a safer, better life.

The Sadrists did not realize that their reign by terror would soon be in jeopardy and their days numbered. The general concept of splitting the radical elements of that movement from the moderate elements would be effective in ending the fighting and leaving the US and ISF as the victors. The fact of this battle, though, and as is so often the case in insurgencies, was that mainstream Sadrists still actively opposed US intervention. Their disdain for the US forces often transpired in the form of outright attacks on the US military and their domestic counterparts throughout the spring of 2008, inhibiting the advancement of the latter two groups' goals in this time period. Further, they had grown in size, as well as in their capability and capacity to make war against their supposed oppressors ("Shi'ite...", 2008). JAM was led by Tasheen al-Freiji, a known Shi'ite militant often in charge of instigating attacks against Sunnis throughout Iraq. Several other noted criminals were part of the militia, with their crimes ranging from attacks on fellow Iraqis to kidnappings and murders of Americans and Britons. Despite the calls by Mr Sadr for a more moderate stance, these leaders, as well as their subordinates, were still very much so the fighters who had previously been the bane of US military operations. 1SG Nicholas Arambula described this quite clearly while operating in Sadr City, saying "It's the same guys...The only difference is that now their weapons are a lot more sophisticated and their bombs are a lot bigger" (Paley- "US

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Deploys...,” 2008). The adversary that the ISF and its American counterparts would be facing in the coming battle would be a cunning one, and an opponent known for not playing by the rules or being considerate of unfortunate civilians caught in the fray.

As the US and its Iraqi allies moved into Sadr City, the reach and stretch of JAM was vividly evident, since:

“Young militants were everywhere. They carried sniper rifles, machine guns, and rocket-propelled grenade launchers. They were on street corners and rooftops ready to fend off any advance by US and Iraqi forces.” (Raghavan- “19...,” 2008)

More so, their commitment to fight was steadfast, even though the IG was quite clear in its pronouncements of doom upon anyone daring to oppose the newly fanged state. One militia member stated the general sentiment of some of the insurgents when he spoke about the situation. “We are allowed to defend ourselves,” he said (Raghavan- “19...,” 2008). This statement brings forth an important feature of JAM, in that many members are not all patently anti-Iraqi militants but just residents of the district seeking to defend themselves against what they view as an overreaching government. These are also the militia members who can easily be turned and brought back into the mainstream through a victory in the information war (Chiarelli & Michaelis, 2005). The goal of the IG then became showing to these people on the fence that the state is the better alternative to splintered armed groups.

In the end, though, JAM would fall, and Mr Sadr would be neutered, with his standing destroyed and respect for him now lacking in the hearts and minds of many Iraqis. Mr Maliki assisted in this, denigrating the militia often, and working to split the public from supporting them. He managed to achieve this goal, in conjunction with the military actions of the US Army and ISF. He also went public about his disgust in regards to their actions, stating bluntly on CNN: “They no longer have a right to participate in the political process or take part in the upcoming elections unless they end the Mahdi Army”. Further, these national leaders were able to sway other influential Iraqis, including the great Shi’ite leader Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, to state his disappointment in the Sadrists. This well-known and eminently respected religious leader possessed great authority in Iraq, and as proclaimed by

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Sadr aide to Reuters, “If they order the Mahdi Army to disband, Moktada al-Sadr and the Sadr movement will obey the orders of the religious leaders.” As summarized by James Glanz and Stephen Farrell in the *New York Times*:

“The crackdown on the Mahdi Army has also eroded Mr. Maliki’s credibility with a large segment of the public that fears Mr. Sadr’s militia but also sees him as a legitimate champion of their interests.” (Glanz & Farrell, 2008)

Through all of this, Mr Maliki succeeded in breaking the back of the militia, but the consequences of this endeavor would be a new challenge for him to face. Taking his newfound power too far could alienate Iraqis, especially those prone to support militias defending their interests. From there, the slippery slope of state versus insurgent control would be evident again, and the IG could lose hard-earned respect if it were to push too hard against the fence-sitters. That said, the Sadrist’s sway had been broken and Mr Sadr was thrown from his position of influence, ashamed and disrespected, leaving the American-backed government of Prime Minister Maliki standing alone and solely in charge of the country.

Iranian Involvement

One final aspect to consider when examining this issue is Iran. Though this Islamic nation never directly admitted its guilt, the implications of its tacit support of the Mahdi Army became very clear during the clash. Even as it quietly supported its Shia brethren, the Iranians denied qualified accusations from both the US and IGs about its role in the fighting. In many ways, this showed how fragile the IG was at the time, since a neighboring country could freely, and in some ways even openly, flaunt the stated sovereignty of another. As such, this battle would help to establish the authority of Iraq over not only its own territory but the actions of other nations, namely Iran. Furthermore, the fact that Iran was aiding a known anti-governmental organization confirmed that the IG could lose control over its territory at any moment. This battle, though, served to reverse this frightening trend, since the dominance of the IG and its security forces was asserted, serving as an example to any other party seeking to undermine the state.

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The ties between Mr Sadr and Iran began in 2005, and grew closer as the tensions rose between the US and Iran (“The Mahdi...,” 2008). Iran viewed this situation as an opportunity to wage a clandestine battle against its “Great Satan,” using Mr Sadr as somewhat unwitting pawn in this global game. The chance to lash out against the US was too inviting to pass up, and as a result, the Iranians jumped right in, providing aid to many groups. They especially favored the Sadrist for their steadfast opposition to the US and interests in subverting a weak IG (West, 48). As one Sadr militant stated in Mr Cockburn’s book, “Iranian policy was to offer aid in the shape of financial support, modern weapons, and a good communications system.” More so, Frederick Kagan, writing in *The Weekly Standard*, described this relationship in more depth, noting that:

“It is true that Iran "supports" the Sadrist militia not only with money, but with lethal weapons, training, trainers, and advisers inside Iraq to support the militia's fight against the United States and the IG.” (Kagan- “How...,” 2008)

Subsequently, Iranian munitions flowed freely into Baghdad and other locales. The statements above clarify the situation, as it was quite evident that the Iranians were cooperating with more than just tactical assistance, since they were providing technical aid and materiel as well (Londono- “US...,” 2008). This was confirmed by evidence such as serial numbers on rockets and packaging materials for these weapons that were discovered during several of these raids and tied directly back to Iranian fronts (Mazzetti et al, 2008). In turn, the ability of Iran to so readily equip and support like-minded groups was a terrifying example of how tenuous IG control over the country had become, a situation that had to be, and was, rectified before the fledgling state collapsed.

Additionally, the assistance in the form of weaponry also brought JAM members into the influence of Iran, even though the true loyalty of these militiamen remained with their hero, Mr Sadr (Cockburn, 168). These co-opted militiamen were serving as unwitting pawns in the great transnational fight for Middle Eastern dominance, and thus their capacity to affect policy had to be obliterated. ADM Mike Mullen, the chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) at the time, summarized this issue clearly, not pulling any punches in criticizing the Iranians: “They continue to train Iraqis in Iran to come back and fight Americans and the coalition” (Mazzetti et al, 2008). Another senior US military leader, MG Rick Lynch,

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supported this conclusion, noting that “What we're seeing now is a more effective use of the Iranian munitions that are in our area, and that's directly tied back to more sophisticated training techniques” (“US and...,” 2008). In sum, the presence of Iranian assistance greatly complicated the relations between Iraq and its neighbor during the clash, since it was quite evident that this player was at least implicitly, if not openly and deliberately, supporting the insurgents. As such, Iraq was not just battling a home-grown uprising, but one that was aided and abetted by a significant outside power intent on making that country in its own mold.

That point made, Iran was able to take hold of some Iraqis, and these former militia members were no longer under the control of Mr Sadr. They became known as the Special Groups by the US and Iraqi militaries, and were essentially Iranian agents in Iraqi bodies. They had no intention of adhering to any of Mr Sadr’s decrees, and basically were free electrons loose in Sadr City, wreaking havoc with no regard to the consequences (Chon- “Iraqi...,” 2008). They attacked US forces even through cease-fires, violating the principles that Mr Sadr had set for his fighters. For them, it was the best of both worlds, since they could roam without restraint and attack at will, all for the greater cause of serving Mr Sadr and his ideals. CPT Ron Underwood, an intelligence officer, noted, “The special groups all have direct communication with OMS [the office of Mr Sadr]” (Paley- “US Deploys...,” 2008). More so, a senior US military official stated that they had received training, ranging from advisory sessions with Iranian intelligence in Iraq to full-blown courses that took place across the border (“US and...,” 2008; Gordon & Schmitt, 2008). Lastly, these Iranian-backed splinter cells often used weapons far more advanced than carried by regular militiamen, clearly indicative of the backing that Iran was providing (“Attacks...,” 2008; Cockburn, 169-170). In conclusion, the Special Groups were just another way in which the instability in Iraq could be characterized. They ran roughshod over the intentions of the government, at least up until this battle. By then the IG had realized the dire nature of the situation, and proceeded to emasculate these groups, ending their reign and preventing them from usurping the state’s authority and power.

PART III

In the Defense of the Country

IRAQ AND THE US INVOLVEMENT

“Contradictory allegiances were the outcome not just of the byzantine and treacherous nature of Iraqi politics but of the muddled and contradictory nature of American policy in Iraq.”

-Patrick Cockburn, Muqtada, 2008

Iraqi Politics

One of the main issues that came about during the run-up to the actual clash involved the intense, essentially life-and-death political rivalry between Prime Minister Maliki and Mr Sadr and his band of fighters. The prime minister and the cleric are natural political rivals, each a Shi'ite and each the de facto head of their respective organizations. More so, they represent the two distinct political Shi'ite profiles- one an outsider and the other one who lived through the horrors of the previous quarter century (Cockburn, 148) Prime Minister Maliki hails from the Islamic Dawa Party, while Mr Sadr heads the loyal opposition that is the Sadr Party (Schuman- “The Morning Brief: Is...,” 2008). In either case, it is truly difficult to really understand who represents what in Iraqi politics, since each recruited a military to back up their respective positions. Prime Minister Maliki had the backing of the formidable US military, while Mr Sadr has his militia, the irregular, impromptu, and ideologically-driven JAM. More so, each had an association with Iran that, contrary to popular belief, is not a mark of doom but rather, a relationship of convenience. This was then case given the great oppression of Shiites by the Sunni Hussein government, and thus Iran was a natural ally in the struggle. As such, the US backed and promoted those who wanted to establish an American-style democracy and supported the presence of American troops, marginalizing those who did not agree, such as Mr Sadr.

If one was to join with the Americans and commit to their ideals, it would be to that figure's benefit, ceteras paribas, providing that the status quo would persist. If not, it was much more likely to become the target of strikes against that person, or at least banishment from the Iraqi political scene. In turn, Iraqis developed an opinion of Americans in which they felt that “the

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Americans seem to think that the history of Iraq started when they invaded” (Cockburn, 6). More so, many Shiites condemn not just Americans but other outside observers as ignorant, even arrogant in pronouncing judgment on them for being so defiant. These Iraqis are of the opinion that American policy makers and executors just do not comprehend their religion, political, and social philosophies (Cockburn, 13). In turn, this misunderstanding, and the differences in mindsets, fueled the conflict, since even though many of their goals of social services and societal acceptance were not necessarily in opposition but just not in quite on the same page (Gordon- “The...,” 2008). Either way, though, Mr Sadr was not compatible with the end state that the US expected to achieve, so he quickly became a target, given his radical ideas about Iraq. Using a militia, and not the government and its security forces, as a base of support was no longer acceptable, so the Prime Minister moved against the militias before they overpowered the state. Thus, Mr Sadr became the objective of IG military operations for the backing that he derived from these disruptive irregular armed groups.

A second related issue in Iraqi politics is that many in certain Iraqi political organizations, especially Mr Sadr’s followers, feel that the IG was using all of its powers and force to reduce their standing in the country. Mr Sadr was especially perturbed about this as he felt strongly that Prime Minister Maliki was using the arms of the state to crush his political party’s rival. In some ways, Mr Sadr is right in that, “elections, however, would undercut the power of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, which is more powerful but less popular among ordinary Iraqis than Sadr's movement” (Fadel, 2008). In this instance, Prime Minister Maliki’s greatest fear was the discontent amongst the Iraqi populace would swell up, leading to his removal from power. Then, the people would be liable to install his feared rival, or one of the same mindset, as leader of the country, therefore erasing the influence of the prime minister and his party. Subsequently, Prime Minister Maliki saw that he would have to do something drastic to restore the confidence of the Iraqi people and preserve the state. The decision made was to crackdown on the Sadrist movement throughout Iraq, which served a dual purpose of demolishing their power and their support base. This was not entirely a Machiavellian scheme to destroy all political rivals, but the opportunity to eliminate the debilitating sway of the militias, mainly Sadr’s adherents, before Iraq could be irreversibly destabilized (Gordon- “The...,” 2008; Kamber et al, 2008). Thus, despite some of the political overtones, this

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operation had to be conducted if the Iraqi state were to endure and gain the deference of the people that it needed to govern effectively.

It was, however, clear this operation was launched without entirely pure intentions. Michael Gordon of the *New York Times* summarized how this transpired:

“The IG billed the operations as a move to extend its sovereignty to lawless areas, and there is much truth to that. But some analysts also said they served another purpose: Maliki and his Supreme Council allies were not going to go into the provincial and national elections until the large population centers had been reclaimed from the Sadrists and other Shiite militias.” (Gordon- “The...,” 2008)

Prime Minister Maliki had to move against the militia, though in the process he could also achieve his goal of castrating much of his opposition (Kamber et al, 2008). It did not matter that in many ways this was a targeted political move as much as it was an operation to stabilize and secure the heart of Iraq. That said, the US did not object, for they viewed this as a necessary step, and praised the Iraqi leader for his newfound resolve. Mr Gordon wrote further, noting that:

“After years of hand-wringing over Maliki’s inability to govern, American officials were cheered that he managed to pull the levers of power and even take on some of the Shiite militias.” (Gordon- “The...,” 2008)

Thus, the IG was finally clamping down on irregular militias and unofficial leaders, seeking to establish the state as the preeminent, and only, power in Iraq. This was further expedited when the prime minister decreed that this organization break apart or face permanent exclusion from Iraqi political life (Schuman- “The Morning Brief: A...,” 2008). The Sadrists would not be permitted to sustain themselves as they had existed; the Iraqi state could not allow this if it were to rule the nation.

US Military Strategy in Iraq

After a long period of missteps and indecisiveness, the US military hierarchy recognized this crisis and strove to change their manner of operating in order to fit the new circumstances. Thomas Ricks, in his account of this makeover of US war-fighting policy in *The Gamble*, describes how two main factors influenced the course of the war. First, the strategy in Iraq

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had to be altered from a myopic, destruction-based, land seizing and holding concept to an incisive, considerate, and targeted assault (Cohen et al, 2006). The battles fought became never-ending as US military forces had to take into account the impact on civilians in addition to how they affected insurgent elements. Furthermore, once a locale was pacified and stabilized, a long-term commitment was required in order to prevent insurgent elements from fomenting again. This concept was ably detailed in a *Foreign Affairs* article written after the conclusion of the fight:

“For now, a substantial U.S. presence is essential to stabilize a system of local cease-fires and maintain an environment in which gradual compromise can proceed without gambling on a single grand bargain among wary rivals in Baghdad.” (Biddle et al, 2008)

Despite all of the gains made by the Iraqis, the US was still needed to shore them up. It would be some time before the ISF could operate freely and on its own, and until then, the US would remain.

Additionally, the need for more troops to effect this policy was realized when the now-infamous Surge of the 2006-2007 timeframe was instituted, which permitted US commanders on the ground to move people to where they were needed. This policy was put into place once American military and political leaders realized that not enough troops were deployed to secure Iraq. As a result, President George W Bush, the President at the time, ordered about 30,000 US soldiers to Iraq to help shore up the country and curtail the rise of the militias and terrorist groups, staunching their influence in the process. Once the forces arrived, and in order to maintain the gains achieved, the US had to commit forces to each place secured, so that anti-government groups could not slip into the void and erase all progress made as had been the end result before (Kagan, 2007). Combined with the new way of fighting, the insurgents were eventually, after some trying times, knocked off balance and the population began to turn against these terrorists and criminals. Aiding this change in conditions was the inclusion of more US troops, as well as newly operational ISF units that could backfill and even replace American soldiers to an extent (Biddle et al, 2008). Subsequently, the clashes that were fought began to have new significance as each one, instead of empowering and expanding insurgent bases, swept them away. The results of this were especially apparent as

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the population fled from their extremist ideals, leaving them isolated, which was a major goal of this policy.

The Beginning of the End

Mr Sadr's stance and provocations brought about his deserved fate, as he was deemed, rightfully, to be an enemy of the Iraqi state. His opinions and goals did not match up with what was in line with constitutional mandates and international objectives, and thus he could not maintain his status unless he changed. Furthermore, the stature of his militia in the eyes of many Iraqis dropped precipitously as they began to transform from being a defender of Shi'ite interests into an unruly troublemaker, an annoying nuisance to the efforts of the IG in steadying Iraq. This situation was further compounded by Mr Sadr's withdrawal to Iran for religious studies in 2007, removing the figurehead of the Sadrist movement when its standing was most threatened ("Attacks...", 2008; "Militants...", 2008). For Mr Sadr, the writing was on the wall, and what had to happen quickly became clear: the IG and he could not coexist. The cleric was not the only one facing issues about standing amongst the Iraqi people.

JAM had itself faced fissures, with some elements, as mentioned, becoming more criminalist in their mentality and thus inciting Prime Minister Maliki to move against them. Not only had they incited the anger of the IG; they had irked the population with their criminal tendencies. As the group matured and Iraqi politics shifted to accommodate the influence of militias on everyday life, they realized that to sustain themselves, they had to resort to new means of generating income. Also, the fact that they had seized control of Sadr City by violence and not through other socially-oriented means meant that they did not have much on which to base their rule. As such, various elements within the organization moved wayward, splintering off to form rogue cells more thuggish than the mainstream militia members. Despite the indirect links, they sullied the name of JAM, subsequently turning the people against the whole militia. From here the people became indignant about how they were treated, and "Communities once dependent on JAM now welcome ISF units as sources of law and order" (Biddle et al, 2008). Thus, the IG could step back into the power void that had been present and soon the downfall of JAM gained momentum, speeding up until the climactic clash ensued.

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The prime minister realized that he had to do something, even if it was politically tinged and would be perceived as such. The Prime Minister said that “The army should be the state's army only, not the army of the militias,” cementing his view on JAM and its future role, or lack thereof, in Iraq. JAM and the ISF were no longer compatible, for the Iraqi state would never have relevancy, currency, and legitimacy if the former stayed visible and respected while the latter was not assertive of its goals and yielding the results expected of it (Gerson-“The...,” 2008). Instead, one or the other had to relinquish the grip on power and submit, for Iraq could not continue on this troubled path if it were ever to become a sovereign nation of respectable and capable strength. In turn, ISF units were dispatched by the IG both in Basra and later in Sadr City to put down this menace, and this decision was solely one made by Iraqis. As one US general put it, “the operation to eliminate the criminal element that controls Sadr City is an entirely Iraqi-developed plan, and it probably represents the biggest political chance that Maliki has taken” (Kitfield, 2008). Once the fighting started, the Prime Minister Maliki maintained his resolve, saying in late March 2008 that “we have made up our minds to enter this battle, and we will continue until the end. No retreat. No talks. No negotiations” (“International...,” 2008). The US did not make this decision, but did support it, as evidenced by GEN Ray Odierno, the US commander in Iraq at the time. He said “I think what he finally realized were that the militias that had safe havens in Sadr City were really trying to destabilize the government of Iraq, and he realized it would add instability to his own government” (“How...,” 2008). This fully destroyed any semblance of cooperation that had existed between JAM and the IG, while convincing some people in the Shia military organizations such as JAM that the prime minister was adamant about destroying them.

The Spark

Many had not foreseen this conflict coming, given that Mr Sadr had become closer with the IG by ordering JAM to submit to a ceasefire in August of 2007 and then sequestering himself in Iran. However, once the fighting in Basra erupted early in 2008, Mr Sadr saw no choice but to break the agreement in order to preserve his force, and reputation (“Shi’ite...,” 2008). JAM and its associated Special Groups were not innocent angels during this time, as they:

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“Had been preparing for an offensive of their own in the first months of 2008, stockpiling arms and moving trained fighters into and around the country. Mr. Maliki’s move into Basra led them to begin their offensive prematurely, including the launching of heavy rocket and mortar attacks against the Green Zone from their bases in Sadr City.” (Kagan et al, 2008)

In turn, the US interests as represented in many ways by the Green Zone became the target of choice for these militants staging out of the friendly confines of Sadr City. Once the intra-Iraqi fight drew American blood, there was no holding back for the US military. It responded in full force to this instigation, in an effort to hinder the launchings and halt the spread of the rot that JAM and the Sadrists had induced in Baghdad.

Subsequently, once the US military entered the battle, JAM reacted in kind, as the militia’s “gunmen also overran government checkpoints and outposts in the district” (“Militants...,” 2008). This was not a US-initiated operation meant to conquer rambunctious portions of Iraq, but rather an attempt to end the power of Mr Sadr and his uncontainable, uncontrollable armed bands, and violence they had wrought. As LTC Steve Strover stated, “we are not the aggressor...we went into south Sadr City to stop the rocket and mortar attacks” (Freeman-“A...,” 2008). More so, the US was governed by Iraqi decrees that it not drive deep into Sadr City, for fears of upsetting the populace and turning the tide of the battle in the direction of the Sadrists. Thus, this was to be an operation with unambiguous limits, seeking only to destroy the sway of Mr Sadr and end the effective captivity of Sadr City that his militia had installed upon it. This was not to be a scheme in which the Americans would take over the area, but instead would use it as an opportunity for the fledgling ISF to assert its power and legitimacy, and establish Iraqi sovereignty over splinter groups (Gordon- “As...,” 2008). No longer would rogue movements and self-selected leaders claiming personal sovereignty over parts of Iraq be allowed to stand. The state could not last if such trends continued.

US MILITARY AND IRAQI SECURITY FORCES

“[Iraq's military leaders] can maneuver troops to where they are needed, [and the presence of those troops] is inspiring greater confidence from the people.”

-Rear Admiral Patrick Driscoll, 2008

The best way to describe the relationship and interplay of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and the US military as the battle unfolded would be analogous to a basketball game. The ISF formulated a concept for this operation and undertook much of the preliminary mission planning, laying the groundwork for the assault on Mr Sadr's illegal army. The US military was still consulted for advice on setting up the maneuver and also asked to provide intelligence, fire support, and logistics assistance, but it was primarily an Iraqi initiative. That said, the nascent ISF units eventually reached the limits of both their abilities and capabilities, lacking the capacity to push through to the full completion of the offensive and also the means to support these activities. Consequently, the Iraqi military can be thought of as the starting player in a basketball game, with the US military as the sixth man, the key substitute ready to jump into action as needed. As such, this happened and as the Iraqi push lost steam the US forces moved to sustain the momentum. From here the battle was won and the power of Mr Sadr and the supremacy of the militias eliminated. Thus, though the Iraqis still required American help, they started the ball moving and the US military just served to keep it rolling.

Iraqi Security Forces (ISF)

The ISF was a mixed bag during this battle, showing tremendous improvement in some aspects and displaying key weaknesses and shortcomings in other regards (Ricks, 281). Despite the fact that the US military had to play a greater role than was desired, the very fact that the ISF had initiated the battle, conducted major combat operations, and was viewed as the face of the battle are all signs of great progress. As Andrew Kramer wrote in the *New York Times*:

“In these recent battles the Iraqi security forces performed far better than previously. While American (and British) combat support and advisory teams remain critical, Iraqis are doing much of the fighting now. Although some units performed badly, the reasons have been identified and addressed.”
(Kramer, 2008)

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Another observer noted that no longer was the ISF a toothless dog but a reasonably capable and increasingly confident fighting force, now with the capacity and experience to battle the enemies of Iraq (Tavernise et al, 2008). This means that although the ISF had, and still has, room to grow and improve its abilities, it had advanced enormously from what it was just a few years before.

As the battle came to show, the ISF has become a veritable military force with the credibility and standing amongst both the local populace and international community. This has now permitted the IG to be able to conduct operations necessary to advance its goals. Even President George W Bush of the US noted the progress of the ISF, saying that the military operation conducted:

“Shows the progress the Iraqi security forces have made during the surge. Iraqi forces planned this operation and they deployed substantial extra forces for it. They're leading the operation... This offensive builds on the security gains of the surge, and demonstrates to the Iraqi people that their government is committed to protecting them.” (Schuman- “The Morning Brief: Iraqi...,” 2008)

This clearly shows the improvement in the ability of the ISF to function as a capable military force, and thus enabled the IG to follow through with its goal of uprooting the entrenched Sadrist elements. With an effective military force, the legitimacy of the state over militias could be ascertained, and these hindering elements could be removed from their position of negative influence. In the end, the fact that actual Iraqi troops were in the fight provided the credence that pushed the Iraqi people to the government's side away from Mr Sadr.

The IG is not completely squared away, though, as there are problems in the ISF that will persist into the future (Ricks, 65). First, since the Iraqi Army under Mr Hussein was completely disbanded, there is still a dearth of senior leadership amongst the noncommissioned officer corps. These personnel, responsible for much of the on-the-ground activity, are still lacking in terms of both numbers and training. Consequently, this will constrain the performance of the Iraqi troops until these numbers reach the necessary critical mass. Another issue is that many of the Iraqi soldiers themselves are quite green, and until they gain this type of combat experience, they will continue to limit the effective range, size,

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and scope of Iraqi military excursions. This was evidenced in Basra, where they ran in the face of a determined insurgent force, though they rectified this embarrassment in Sadr City. In this situation they finally showed their resolution to defend their country and to stand and fight against the threat to the country's sovereignty, Mr Sadr ("International...", 2008). JAM pushed them back, but they eventually stood their ground and held the position they occupied, finally showing their tenacity.

The most important weakness is that the ISF still requires significant assistance from the US military. Complicating matters is the fact that sometimes this relationship is uneasy and uncertain, with a convoluted decision-making process and unclear operational boundaries. In turn, maneuvers are somewhat hampered by this lack of clarity, and ISF elements have difficulty executing their plans since they lack many organic capabilities. Among these are air movement and long-range strike abilities, in addition to many technical and battlefield support mechanisms (Kamber et al, 2008). These are subsequently provided by the Americans, and until this shortcoming is remedied, overall mission accomplishment will be limited. In sum, the ISF has improved greatly, and is becoming better equipped to handle these types of security emergencies, but it is still tied to the US military due to the fact that it is lacking in so many facets (Gordon- "As...", 2008). However, despite this evidence seemingly condemning ISF operational efficacy, it is developing these assets, with American assistance, so that it no longer has to rely on the US military. (Biddle et al, 2008). Once these capabilities reach maturity, the ISF should be able to adequately defend its country from its enemies, both foreign and domestic. This battle showed how young that military still is and the steps it must take, but nonetheless it has progressed far from where it was just a couple of years earlier.

Despite these shortcomings there is optimism that the ISF is now ready to handle security operations to a larger extent. They have confidence as well as experience through their successful prosecutions of both the operation in Sadr City and the other to the south in Basra. The leaders of the ISF are now battle-tested, and are taking over checkpoints and patrolling from their American counterparts to an even greater degree each day. Further, the IG can actually rely on its military forces to execute its policy, and do so in a manner that is reflective

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of its intentions, without having to suffer the embarrassment of backing down. More so, the US can now begin to draw down its military forces since the ISF has shown itself to be competent enough to conduct ground operations on its own. Lastly, the Iraqi people now have a legitimate protector in the state, since the government can both defend and advance its interests, in addition to keeping the population safe. These were functions often performed by the militias prior to the operations that took place in the spring of 2008. Now, they could be executed by the ISF, much to the benefit of the IG's reputation and calming many of the people's fears about inadequate security. That said, in the end, this incursion was an Iraqi operation, despite the American guidance, as summarized by Michael Gordon and Stephen Farrell in the New York Times:

“No American ground forces accompanied the Iraqi troops, not even military advisers. But the Americans shared intelligence, coached the Iraqis during the planning, and provided overhead reconnaissance throughout the operation. Still, the operation was very much an Iraqi plan.” (Gordon and Farrell-
“Iraqi...,” 2008)

Thus, in many ways the performance of the Iraqi forces is indicative of the progress made by the IG, since they actually fought and persevered against an entrenched foe. Through their success, they managed to enhance the legitimacy of their government, and raise its standing, as well as their own, in the eyes of the Iraqi populace. The militias now had a new variable to consider, one that could effectively and capably end their reign and establish the government as the sole authority in Iraq.

US Military

Originally, the US military was not supposed to have been involved in the fighting in any substantial manner. However, this policy soon changed once both the Iraqi and American commanders on the ground realized that the conflict was too much for the fledgling ISF to handle. In turn, the US troops were brought into the fray, in addition to air assets, other advising units, and heavier weapons including tanks (Biddle et al, 2008). Thus, what was at one point a purely Iraqi operation morphed into a joint effort whose initiative was often sustained by the Americans. As such, the ISF was slated to take control of the planning and execution, but since this was their first major battle on their own, they simply were not prepared enough. Consequently, it became the US Army's ballgame in many regards

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(“International...,” 2008). The Iraqi forces could manage to wage war to an extent, but soon had to call on their American allies to finish the game, given that the latter had the resources to follow through.

At the onset, the US military was playing backup to the ISF, which actually took the lead in an operation for the first time. The US would provide assistance to include advisors, fire support assets and associated coordinators, and up-to-date intelligence, but the Iraqis would get to prepare their concept and execute it. That said, the US military was still omnipresent, given the 360-degree, three dimensional nature of the battlefield, and many of its resources would appear to be there at the tip of the spear. More so, it was openly stated that if the Iraqis were to be overcome by enemy forces, they would be helped. This pledge was not a repudiation of the ISF’s capability but just a way of letting the insurgency know that if the Iraqi soldiers were to falter, the US would be ready to assist as required (Raghavan et al, 2008). This eventually came to fruition, and once the Americans entered the fray, it would be their show, since ISF officers had minimal oversight of US operations (Raghavan- “Caught...,” 2008). This had already begun in earnest because some of the US aid, including attack helicopters and other types of air assets, executed missions of their own initiation. The one limit that was nominally imposed upon the US military was that it could have limited access into Sadr City beyond the southern portion where it was given permission to operate. The IG looked at the situation, and the past disdain by the residents of the district towards the American forces, and thus viewed American movements beyond this limit as too risky. The population was far too likely to become enraged by such an action, and from there the situation could devolve as the people become newly invigorated by what they view as another invasion upon their lives and territory. This was instituted due to fears about the harmful consequences and type of reaction that might manifest in the angry, pro-Sadr populace (Londono and Raghavan, 2008). Pushing too far could swing the momentum of the battle back in the Sadrist favor and give them new reasons to inspire the people to resist the incursion.

PART IV

The Battle Plays Out

COALITION FORCES' TACTICS, TECHNIQUES, AND PROCEDURES

“[Americans] take great care to prevent any collateral damage and will continue to do so. We don’t target civilians and regret any casualties.”

-Col. Gerald O’Hara, US Army

(Alissa J Rubin, “Missiles Strike Sadr City, Damaging Hospital,” New York Times, 05 MAY 2008)

The most important fact to consider when discussing the US military and ISF tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) is that restraint and accuracy were prized. While incredible displays of swift and brutal force were in order on many occasions, the main goal of the clash was not to annihilate the enemy and the battlefield but to secure Sadr City. To this end, the US and its Iraqi allies sought to find, fix, and destroy the enemy in a manner that not only effectively eliminated this threat but also served to enhance the quality of life in the district. This had not been properly implemented before this timeframe in Iraq, as purely kinetic warfare was generally the main course of action for far too long. One, however, cannot fight a war against a fleeting enemy by unleashing destruction on everything in sight—this is far more likely to destroy popular support than the enemy. Further, this also is not an effective way to earn the population’s respect and trust, and subsequently was abandoned by US military planners as they came to the realization that such a strategy was actually counterproductive (Ricks, 120 & 167). More so, a purely military victory would not be enough; rather, it was necessary to tie in security improvements with enhancements in the living conditions. As such:

“The U.S. strategy in Iraq depends on jobs, services and other basic improvements to buttress the fragile security gains made here in recent weeks and to draw support away from the militia controlled by anti-American cleric Muqtada al-Sadr.” (“In...,” 2008)

Only then, if the void left behind by a defeated insurgency was filled with betterments in daily life and pervasive protection from thugs could a true victory be recorded. In turn, a combination of hard military actions with softer, people-focused activities was employed,

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seeking to better the situation for the residents while pushing out the insurgents disrupting daily life. Successful implementation of these policies would not only reduce pressure on the American forces and permit them to reduce their obligations; it would also serve to enhance the stature of the ISF and improve IG control over the country.

Working with the Populace

Taking account of the civilian interests was one of the key tenets of US and Iraqi military strategy during the battle, and a lesson that had been painfully learned from past missteps (Ricks, 60 & 65-66). LTG Lloyd Austin, the second highest-ranking American commander in Iraq, stated the US and Iraqi's task as that of showing the residents of Sadr City how cooperation would only help them. If they chose to seek them instead of the insurgents as their partner, then quality of life and economic well-being, in addition to security, would all be better ("In...", 2008). If the US could show Sadr City's residents the benefits of siding with them, then it would be much easier to isolate and eradicate the extremist elements of JAM (West, 46). This would make the overall fight much easier, while reducing both friendly and innocent casualties and improving the overall security situation.

Further, the more that could be done to better Sadr City and the situation of its populace, the more likely it may be that they would provide assistance to the US in locating malevolent insurgents (Ricks, 26 & 157). This would not only reduce the impact on residents but would greatly facilitate military operations. As a result, the US and its Iraqi counterparts worked tirelessly to win over the populace as the battle wound down, spending prodigiously on public works projects, setting up medical clinics to aid sick and hurting civilians, and creating jobs (Dagher- "Blast...", 2008). The latter was extraordinarily important since many unemployed men joined militias in an attempt to better their lives. From here the IG and US military could not only deprive the insurgents of a major source of manpower but also drive the wedge deeper between the radical elements and the rest of the population (Ricks, 173). Finally, another major aspect of this initiative is that meetings with local leaders were sought in order to identify and address issues bothering the populace. Subsequently, these problems could be resolved, removing this potential catalyst for negative reactions and further pushing the fringe elements away from the moderates ("Shi'ite...", 2008). By seeking to locate the root causes

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of problems that caused ordinary civilians to move into the insurgency's fold and then striving to remove this instigation, it would be far more likely that the people would seek the IG to solve future issues. The insurgency would now be devoid of its source of support and aid, and would be likely to wither, especially in the face of carefully targeted military strikes.

Another major program that was instituted involved taking in anonymous tips from willing providers in order to pinpoint insurgent enclaves. This was especially noteworthy since this program could in many ways serve as a measuring device for the local attitude towards the IG in contrast to JAM. If the tips flowed freely and were veritable, then this would be evidence of the commitment of the populace to aid the fledgling state. On the other hand, a cold shoulder and lack of reciprocation could be indicative of negative feelings, constraining and even endangering future military operations. Potentially more frightening, a quiet and unwilling populace could become so terrified in that assisting the government would yield harm unto them by the insurgent forces. That said, the former situation could be an indicator of US military and ISF operations turning the local Iraqis towards them at the expense of the insurgents' standing. MG Qassim Atta of the ISF affirmed this obligation, vowing that "we need to build trust in those people and those citizens ever since each returned to any family will also restore [a better] situation" ("Rear...", 2008). The latter state, however, might very well show that these efforts were misguided or not directed clearly enough, or even that the population was turning against them ("Sadr...", 2008). This could be the case if the operations launched were too blunt and misguided, or maybe that the Sadrist had created a better set of affairs for the population.

Either way, MG Atta stated that "It's the job of the government and the security forces to help them whether they provide the tips or not" ("Multinational...", 2008). As such, what mattered is that the security situation and quality of life in Sadr City be improved no matter how the residents viewed the efforts. Eventually, as happened, the residents started to turn, and thus these initiatives would bear fruit, which also transpired (Gordon- "War...", 2008; Kagan et al, 2008). Additionally, these tips not only showed how the populace was placing more trust in the government and its military units, but that they clearly wanted these terrorizing groups out. More so, as this broader goal was being accomplished, the smaller and

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more readily apparent aspects were shown forth as insurgent weapons and materiel were seized. This helped to limit their effectiveness, while showing the worth of the information that could be provided by neighborhood citizens (“How...,” 2008). Subsequently, the Iraqi civilians moved away from JAM and Mr Sadr’s hold, trusting in and providing legitimacy to the IG through the actions during this period.

MG Atta summarized this state of affairs well in his press conference and how much progress had been made in diminishing the influence of the militia while boosting the reputation of the government:

“Now those troops control the area in a good way, and also provide some urgent and services to the people in Sadr City. Our basic concern is to restore stability and security to the people and to eliminate the outlaws and restrict weapon with the Iraqi Army so that we can start the reconstruction and start providing the basic services. There are so many projects that are still waiting to be initiated and all this is not being done due to the presence of the outlaws in this city.” (“Rear...,” 2008)

In the end, the projects focused on bettering life in Sadr City turned the tide in a favorable manner, and forced the extremists out of the mainstream and into the cold, where they were marginalized and shunned from society. The very fact that these public works initiatives could be instituted and the insurgency controlled was in many ways the best indicator of how far Iraq had progressed. This was the case since the people wanted the government to act assertively, even forcefully, but not in a desperate manner. They now believed that the IG, not the militias or other stateless actors, was the preeminent source of power and assistance in the country, and wanted to turn to it in times of need.

Rules of Engagement (ROE)

Rules of engagement (ROE) and restraint in the use of force as another defining feature of US military TTPs. One senior US Army officer, COL Timothy Edens, described US policy:

“It is as precise as very hardworking soldiers and commanders can make it. These criminals do not operate in a clean battle space. It is occupied by civilians.” (Londono & Paley- “In...,” 2008)

Thus, the US sought to avoid causing unnecessary, or for that matter, any casualties at all in the populace. The tenets of the Geneva Convention that the Coalition forces so closely

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followed to necessitate such a policy, so as to avoid inciting anger against them from the world as whole, not just from the Iraqis. The rationale behind this goal is that any person killed or even hurt could very well fuel the impulse of another to seek revenge. This could then impair the progress sought in convincing the local population to side with the Iraqis in this fight. MG Atta discussed the difficulties of this fight, given the close confines of Sadr City and how crowded the district was in terms of civilians. As such,

“The battle now by the Iraqi Security Forces is not a regular one, it's a...street fight, where the most important thing is to take care of the civilians in Sadr City...And this means that when you fire a single round, it will fall upon a citizen. That's why the Iraqi Security Forces are keen to conduct their operations...with precision.” (“Rear...,” 2008)

The point being made here is that while it is necessary to eliminate the threat posed by the militia, in doing so maximum care and extraordinary accuracy in targeting extremist elements had to be exercised. Otherwise, the local population could turn, viewing the US and Iraqi troops as indiscriminate and careless, leading angry civilians to provide aid of various types, be it overt or covert, in terms of information, supplies, and shelter to the insurgents.

Consequently, all of the military efforts launched had to be carefully coordinated and implemented so as to avoid this potential disaster. One Iraqi official noted the lengths to which the Coalition forces were working to ensure that nothing untoward happened to the people:

“Our troops would be able to crush and eliminate those gangs in a very fast way, but we would like to avoid the human casualties. So we are being patient and trying to be more patient in choosing the operations to deal with those situations.”

An American counterpart confirmed these guidelines, and how they played out in the clash, remarking how:

“Iraqi and coalition units are responding appropriately to these teams that position themselves close to public buildings and within residential neighborhoods and thereby endanger innocent civilians.” (“Sadr...,” 2008)

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In turn, great concern for the people of the embattled district was a primary operating parameter, because ignoring their interests could very well have endangered the US and Iraqi military forces. More so, by showing the Iraqi populace how they sought to protect them, targeting strikes in such a manner to minimize or even fully and completely prevent any impact. From here, a wedge between the moderates and radicals could be created. Then, the people would realize that it was extremist members of Sadr's party and militia who were the real threat, and thus these could then be isolated and purged.

Incredibly accurate weapons and well-planned attacks that took civilian considerations into account were another main aspect of the US military TTPs. These permitted the US to precisely place force where it was needed, while avoiding spillover onto the neighboring residents and residences. LTC Steve Stover commented on these efforts, noting that:

“We take every precaution when destroying the rocket sites that are killing and injuring the Iraqi people, their security forces, and US soldiers...Our Hellfire missiles are a precision-guided weapon and we have been very successful at only destroying what we aim at.” (Londono- “Clashes...,” 2008)

By doing this, and in a manner that fully accounts for the negative consequences of failing to do so, the US was able to, for the most part, avoid unneeded casualties and messy results from misguided attacks (“Rear...,” 2008). Subsequently, the district's populace started to turn against Mr Sadr and his minions, providing tips freely and even cooperating openly with the US, showing that they had not been unnerved by the military operations (Rubin- “Missiles...,” 2008). However, despite this enormous advantage in weaponry, the employment of these resources was very often limited in both scale and scope. This was due to concerns by the US military of collateral damage and the negative effects, and also the perception manifested by the local population, about this seemingly excessive use of force (“Gordon- “As...,” 2008). That said, the US military sought to bring to bear only as much firepower as required, and no more, so as to avoid inflaming civilians caught in the fighting. Thus, the precise application of military force directed within strict bounds enabled the US and its Iraqi allies to push JAM and the irregular Special Groups out of Sadr City. After that, they moved to fill the void, preventing a disruptive force from entering and seizing the opportunity to strengthen the standing of the new Iraqi state.

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One last point that must be made regarding ROE is that the US military has them, yet their adversaries, such as JAM here, often do not. Thus, the planners must make difficult decisions about how to conduct the battle such that the mission is accomplished, casualties both friendly and civilian are minimized and the impact on the AO is limited. However, the enemy fighters faced today so easily disregard either of the last two guidelines, operating in a manner inconsistent with the maintenance of human and civil rights. In turn, US officers have to make difficult determinations about how the battle will play out, attempting to isolate and destroy malevolent elements without upsetting those caught in the middle. This does not always turn out as planned, and as a result, negative repercussions may transpire. These must be avoided as they can so dangerously impede the accomplishment of greater, politically-oriented goals beyond just eliminating enemy threats. On the other hand, the US military cannot allow itself to be hamstrung by stringent rules and incongruous parameters if it is to destroy insurgent cells. In conclusion, the challenge faced by the US military, both in this battle and in ones past, present, and future, is how to complete its missions at a minimum loss of life, both in terms of American soldiers and native residents. The balance then must be achieved between accomplishing assignments and keeping the hearts and minds of the local populace in line with US interests. COIN requires the latter, yet it will become impossible to destroy imminent threats sometimes if such concerns prevent needed action.

Striking the Source

Another significant aspect of US Army TTPs to consider is how these soldiers went about finding, fixing, and destroying the enemy. The manner in which they did so was directed in such a way that was unmistakably indicative that great pains were taken to limit collateral damage. While it was important to kill enemy threats and remove them from the scene, destruction of enemy assets alone would not bring about victory. Rather, it was imperative that immediate dangers to public welfare be eliminated as they arose, and that military operations be aimed only in that direction. Otherwise, the population, already restive and somewhat hostile, would rapidly strengthen opposition to the American military as well as their Iraqi allies, and the situation would unravel from there (Kagan- "Choosing...", 2008). In turn, US forces sought to accurately strike as needed, scalable to the situation and using only as much violence as was required. More so, rather than indiscriminately going after insurgent

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cells, they methodically isolated each one from its base of popular support, and then, using coordinated and integrated attacks, stamped them out. As such, the most important aspects of this strategy were the use of combined air, ground, and civil affairs efforts and scaled responses in addition to combat presence patrols. The last facet of the ground strategy was important as getting out into the population is key to discovering and understanding their hopes and fears. When one is constantly around, the people start to trust these military units more, offering information and turning to them, instead of irregular armed groups, as problems manifest.

Helicopters and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) were also key to the US's success in the battle, as they could not only loiter over the AO but also deliver their weapons very precisely. Further, the weapons employed by the aforementioned platforms tend to be rather accurate, and include such tools of war as light cannons, rockets, and guided munitions, mainly the laser-homing Hellfire missile (Londono- "Iraq...", 2008). Again, as mentioned previously, these munitions are appropriate for the confines of densely and heavily populated civilian enclaves given their small blast radii. In particular, the Hellfire missile was often used as it had a powerful blast but could be directed to very exact locations, and was not overly destructive as it struck its intended target ("Drone...", 2008). At the same time though, this small but potent warhead on this missile was not so overpowering so as to cause unneeded and unwanted collateral damage, which was imperative to the mission of protecting the populace ("How...", 2008). A weapon that could adeptly eliminate an enemy threat without harming nearby structures is very powerful indeed, both literally and figuratively. The militia members could not hide from a weapon that could readily track them and then swiftly and cleanly, really quite surgically, remove them from the clash. Then, people and buildings collocated with these menaces would not be scarred as the strike was perfectly sized and positioned given these circumstances to avoid unwanted collateral effects.

Building on this is the fact that these weapons were quite useful, and valuable in this type of setting, and in turn were integrated into the primary TTPs. However, other less violent and direct means were also employed, as they not only reduced undesired collateral damage but often led to better outcomes. Thus, if the circumstances were conducive to lower-intensity

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TTPs less reliant on hard power and more so on the soft power previously discussed, then the latter was quickly chosen over the former. LTC Stover aptly summarized the US Army's approach to handling these problems as "If we see any criminal elements firing mortars, rockets or planting an IED, we're going to engage them and kill them" (Raghavan- "Delicate...", 2008). This was the case since one of the key lessons learned through the US military's experiences in conducting COIN operations was that force must appropriately scaled to the given situation. If one applies too much might, those not directly involved in the fighting may revile the one delivering the blow, leading to inadvertent victory for one's enemy because the uninvolved civilian populace has turned against it. On the other hand, being too meager and weak in responding to threats could embolden and even strengthen the enemy, leading to a more dangerous foe.

This quandary is one that is faced often by the US military as it works to subdue insurgencies, and several unique TTPs evolved from these happenings. One of these is the use of combat presence patrols, in which US military and ISF units conducted missions in the AO hoping to deter enemy elements from taking over that area (West, 43). In this, the patrols moved about neighborhoods, first inquiring about the status of basic human services and the state of infrastructure. Then, after they had ensured that the populace was seeing that these requirements for life were fulfilled and that the relationship between them had begun to develop, the soldiers started asking about insurgent activity. Subsequently, the civilians were more likely to offer tips and information if they had seen that these forces were not just robotic killing machines but people who cared about daily needs. This multifaceted policy ties into the soft power that is utilized often by the US and Iraqi military units, as it often yielded greater, more pervasive and far-reaching rewards than just pure military force. Also part of this was the use of checkpoints, a static cordon and search operation that controlled the flow of traffic. Any person or vehicle attempting to access Sadr City was stopped, investigated, and only after they had been cleared of suspicious intent were they allowed to proceed (Londono- "US...", 2008). This was very effective in keeping check on the movement of men and materiel in and out of the district, and useful in starving JAM of the people and relevant equipment and supplies required to fight. Consequently, bombings by way of IEDs and attacks by other means were also reduced, given the restrictions placed upon

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the militia's capabilities. The one downside of utilizing this method is that it blocks off access for ordinary civilians hoping to enter or exit a certain area. That said, it can be used if the forces employing it ably explain its purpose and show that the temporary inconvenience will eventually benefit them far more than it may have impaired them. In sum, the use of carefully steered military actions was the proper way to battle the COIN in Sadr City, and aided the accomplishment of the goal of removing the radical Sadrists from this area.

Another significant portion of the TTPs used in this battle was the targeted isolation and elimination of extremist elements. As mentioned, US policy sought to drive a wedge between the radical Sadrists and their associated special groups, while bringing the more moderate elements of the militia into the mainstream of Iraqi life and politics (Gerson- "The...", 2008). This strategy was outlined by LTC Stover as one in which:

"US soldiers will defend ourselves and protect the Iraqi people from attack... We are not looking for a fight, but will kill or capture those criminals and terrorists who commit acts of violence." (Londono- "Troops...", 2008)

In turn, the former would be purged from the scene, in order to remove their debilitating and destabilizing activity and influence. Therefore, carefully targeted military operations were launched against them. Whether these strikes were being launched from above by way of Predator UAVs or on the ground with special units focused on these types of missions, the US military chose methods that would best eliminate these disruptors while endangering the local populace as little as possible ("How...", 2008). At times stronger force was required, and employed, but was as limited in scale and scope as possible to avoid unnecessarily harming the inhabitants of the district (Gordon- "War...", 2008). That said, the main direction that US and ISF TTPs took was to take out the enemy that could not be co-opted by other means and do so in a manner that took into consideration the well-being of those caught in the middle of this clash.

Lessons Learned, Lessons Applied

One final aspect of American TTPs was the fact that the US military sought to learn from its mistakes, so that it would not repeat them in the future. As such, all operations are dissected *ex post facto* in order to determine what went well, what did not, and what should be done in

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the future to improve missions and enhance outcomes. This battle is clearly indicative of this policy, as past errors were often corrected, and even mistakes that transpired during the fighting resulted in changes to guidelines. Bing West, a journalist and former US Marine, discussed early US COIN operations in his 2005 work *No True Glory*. This work detailed the US military's response to a Sunni uprising in 2004 in Anbar Province, and brought forth several important lessons that were taken into account in plans for this operation. Three major ones were appropriately applying force, a sense of consistency in the strategy, and understanding thy enemy. First, using force in a targeted, almost sanitary manner was key to US success in this battle, as discussed previously. Rather than blindly launching attacks in a manner that ignored the considerations of the residents of Sadr City, American military strikes were placed where, and more importantly, when, they were needed (West, 6). In turn, the local attitude, though not friendly to the US at all, never devolved into full-fledged rebellion as there was no direct reason for such a sentiment, which ultimately allowed for the end result that occurred.

The second important lesson learned involved how to create and implement a strategy that not only intelligently attack the enemy, but was executed in a patient, persistent manner (West, 5). This in turn prevented JAM from finding holes to exploit, and subsequently reduced their effectiveness since the pressure was never let up on them. This frequent, forceful consistency in turn pushed them into a corner, one in which the civilians lost faith in them while the US military slowly but surely whittled away at their strength and war-making capacity. They lost their base of support, followed thereafter by their effectiveness, and eventually were forced to capitulate. In turn, the Iraqi state was strengthened, and the legitimacy of the militias was lost to the government.

One last lesson learned from past experiences was in regards to how the militias fought in Iraq, and then how to combat their distinct, almost disorganized manner of fighting (West, 68). Highly advanced, technology-heavy forces with an emphasis on taking, but not holding ground are ineffective in this setting as the enemy is not of this type (West, 16). Instead, the key to success in fighting a successful COIN involves putting troops in the cities, striking only at the actual threats, and then filling any voids with effective social service program

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(West, 133). The US military realized that this was the manner in which its military operations should be conducted, and consequently changed its TTPs to match its adversary. From there, the battle turned in their favor, and JAM was thrown from the scene, with the supremacy of the Iraqi state strengthened. It became impossible for the militia to combat the constant presence of US and Iraqi troops in their home territory, especially as their adversaries worked to undermine the base of support in the population.

INSURGENT TACTICS, TECHNIQUES, AND PROCEDURES

“The challenge you run into is he can shoot a rocket and pull into a garage...They shoot and they are gone.”

-MAJ Will Downing, US Army

(Ernesto Londono and Amit R Paley, “In Iraq, a Surge in U.S. Airstrikes; Military Says Attacks Save Troops' Lives, but Civilian Casualties Elicit Criticism,” Washington Post, 23 MAY 2008)

In contrast to the sophisticated, specialized, organized, and professional TTPs that were employed by the US military, JAM seemed downright primitive, even thuggish in its operations. That said, the strategy they utilized met their capabilities and goals well, and was well-thought out, despite the somewhat basic manner in which they fought. The main reason they started stirring up trouble in Baghdad was to draw the ISF away from Basra where another clash was happening (Raghavan- “19...,” 2008). In turn, they started launching rockets and generally sowing seeds of rebellion. Then, when the ISF and its American counterparts moved against them, they started fighting a full-tilt battle, with methods reminiscent of a guerilla campaign and not a force-on-force clash.

Civilian Interaction and Considerations

One the most important parts of the insurgents' strategy was that they often co-located with civilians. This was executed by either actually emplacing the residents of Sadr City between them and American forces and or using structures inhabited by civilians in the district for cover and concealment. The first atrocity is a gross and blatant violation of the Geneva Convention, while the second one is just another perverse continuation of the militia's strategy. One IG official described JAM as “Criminals [that] are using the people of Sadr City as shields” (“Sadr...,” 2008). Further, they often placed themselves in positions they knew that the US military would be loath to attack, such as schools and mosques. More so, JAM often attempted to fight in “densely populated areas,” so that the US military could “be held responsible for any civilian deaths” (Paley- “5...,” 2008). LTC Stover confirmed the usage of this tactic, stating:

“Criminal elements continue to put innocent Iraqis in harm's way by attacking Iraqi Security Forces and. Coalition soldiers from rooftops, alleyways and

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residential buildings...These criminals know what they are doing, and their actions prove they don't care for the lives of innocent civilians.” (“Coalition...,” 2008)

He also commented on this situation, indicting the militia on its unfair and basically barbaric methods, saying “What does that say about the enemy? He is heartless and evil” (Paley- “US Role...,” 2008). In turn, these reprehensible tactics caused the residents of Sadr City to mutiny against the militias, since their tactics were upsetting them, due to the harm they were causing. This only helped the US military and IG as the population sought their assistance instead of the agony brought upon them by the Sadrists.

All of these observations and conclusions clearly show that many elements JAM were inconsiderate of civilian life and property, not caring about the results of their actions. They purposely placed the residents of Sadr City in harm’s way by operating out of schools and mosques, sites generally off-limits to US forces. More so, the fighters attempted to disappear into the crowds, often using them as human shields. Additionally, these insurgents would attack and then run into crowded locales that were not only difficult to penetrate for the US military but could result in many civilian casualties if a fight was to manifest. LTC Stover detailed some of these vile and depraved tactics, saying, “Moqtada has lost a lot of popularity, because he's only harming the ordinary people.” As such, American soldiers would hold back to avoid disturbing the local populace and ruining support. However, JAM did not calculate the risks of its TTPs, and subsequently lost the backing of the populace (“Sadr...,” 2008). In the end, this callousness by some of JAM’s members towards the residents of the district led to their downfall, as they upset their supporters too much, thus allowing the US military and ISF to establish their dominance and legitimacy.

Guerilla Warfare

Another important part of JAM’s strategy involved taking advantage of the closeness of construction in Sadr City, using buildings often as hide-outs and fortresses. The maze-like, incredibly congested labyrinth that is this district definitely favors the defender, especially one who knows the area from birth and has the assistance of the district’s residents (West, 263). In turn, JAM used the streets as fighting positions, exploiting these narrow thoroughfares to expedite movement and protect themselves from US counterattacks. The fact that the

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residents of this forlorn district were moving about and conducting their own affairs in the midst of this fighting only aided the militia. This was the case since, as mentioned, the US military would try to avoid firing into the teeming masses if at all possible, given all the harm that would likely transpire (Dagher- “Sadr...,” 2008). Additionally, JAM would exploit the buildings lining these streets, as well as their rooftops, as hideouts, using the alleyways between them to quickly change locations (“US Troops...,” 2008). Thus, as the battle transitioned to other parts of the district, or American or Iraqi soldiers transitioned to another place, the insurgents would simply slip between structures and show up. Consequently, this made it very difficult for this threat to be countered, given the concern for civilian casualties and the fact that the enemy was basically ghost (Chon- “World...,” 2008). This led to the reliance on the policy of trying to turn Sadr City’s population against the insurgents, pointing out how these fighters were the source of trouble. This became the policy by which the Coalition military planners sought to take down the militia and combat its TTPs, as other methods failed to take into full consideration the will and opinion of the district’s inhabitants.

Building on this is that JAM often employed hit and run attacks, using the buildings as launching points for these before disappearing back into the crowds. After starting an assault from a rooftop or building’s window as US and Iraqi forces moved in, the militia members would fire and attempt to stop that venture. Then, when the Coalition troops responded in kind, the fighters vanished, scurrying back to their hiding places to live and fight another day (“US Troops...,” 2008). The *Washington Post* described JAM’s TTPs:

“Militiamen jumped into the street, then quickly vanished...The quick movements were a tactic...that one group of fighters would direct a barrage of bullets at the Stryker to distract the soldiers while another group tried to slip a powerful roadside bomb under the vehicle and then detonate it.” (Raghavan- “19...,” 2008)

Clearly, the insurgents were not a horde of marauding bandits but a relatively well-organized and rather cunning organization of veteran, hardened fighters. They knew how to strike at the American and Iraqi troops in a manner that would maximize their impact, while hoping to reduce the amount of time that could be spent in direct contact. For them, a full-on battle was not what they were seeking as such an encounter would be detrimental to the continued

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existence. Instead, short but sharp jabs followed by scurrying away produced the best results. Subsequently, cell phones and young runners helped to spread news and coordinate disparate efforts to best exploit the situation. Furthermore, bombs and other explosive weapons were often used to commence battles as JAM hoped to make the most of the disorder and chaos following the blast (“Coalition...,” 2008). Then, as the US and Iraqi soldiers recovered, they would attack, firing and attempting to damage their fighting abilities before melting away when the response became too intense for them.

Fighting Coalition military forces head-on for extended periods was not conducive to their prolonged survival, so protracted battles were not in order (Londono & Paley- “In...,” 2008). Instead, the quick attacks that focused on creating the appearance of a larger, more fearsome force and followed by hiding were used as much as possible since this tipped the advantage in their favor (Raghavan- “19...,” 2008). They had full knowledge of their battlefield, and understood that their resources, training, and manpower capabilities could never match up with the US and its Iraqi allies. Instead, they sought to use what they knew best- their neighborhood and their ambushes- to challenge their adversaries, but never directly (Totten, 2009). In turn, the US learned to adeptly fight back against them, using soft power and select but potent applications of firepower to destroy the militia. This could not be opposed by JAM, and eventually caused it to fall from power in the district and grace with its residents, their former supporters. With this fall came the rise of the ISF, as they had finally defeated perhaps the most dangerous threat to the existence of the IG, the religiously-driven and popularly supported pseudo-political militia JAM.

PART V

Results

THE END OF THE BATTLE

"[These] instances underline sad truths about urban warfare. The daily horror for families and children living near the front line area of Sadr City is that who is a friend and who a foe is no longer a meaningful question. Heavy weapons do not discriminate. The militias use rocket-propelled grenades, sniper rifles and mounted machine guns as well as AK-47 rifles while the Americans shoot Hellfire missiles, tank rounds, satellite-guided missiles and rounds from machine guns."

-Alissa J Rubin, "Missiles Strike Sadr City, Damaging Hospital," New York Times, 05 MAY 2008

Civilians caught in the crossfire of any military clash suffer, but the key to determining who won in the current state of affairs is often decided by how they view the battle, are treated, and are affected by the aftermath. While seizing and holding ground and destruction of the enemy can be used to measure the success of military operations, the fact of the matter is that popular opinion can negate everything else. This is the case since the people will never accept a proclaimed victor unless this force treats them well and with respect, while keeping them safe from further harm. In this fight, the terroristic tendencies on the part of the insurgents and the push by US and Iraqi military elements to supplant the aforementioned led them to perceive these forces as their protectors, not occupiers (Sly, 2008). However, the key to future success would lie in how the populace was treated and how the US and Iraqi military planners conducted the cleanup and rebuilding operations. BG Mike Milano, the American deputy commander for Baghdad stated clearly how this battle could have dramatic and far-reaching effects: "If we get Sadr City right and create irreversible momentum, there's no turning back" (Londono- "In...", 2008). If they could do so in a compassionate and considerate matter, the tide of the war would continue to turn in their direction. If not, then all of their efforts and expenditures could very well mean nothing, while JAM and Mr Sadr rebuilt their strength and reestablished themselves as the defenders of Sadr City and protectors of its people. Finally, caring for the citizens and showing that the government and its forces

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were seeking to protect them to allow them to prosper once peace was established would finally vault the supremacy of the state over that of the militias.

Public Perception

One of the key indicators of these efforts was how the population saw the two warring sides. As discussed, if the US and its Iraqi allies became seen as benevolent victors, then the residents of Sadr City would become more likely to seek their assistance, fleeing from the militias. Conversely, heavy-handed tactics that failed to appreciate their needs could easily push them towards Mr Sadr and his minions. This in turn would reduce the standing of the IG and US military, and prevent them from accomplishing their tasks of pacifying Baghdad and ending the reign of irregular military units. Subsequently, the former path did transpire, as the Sadrists became the bad guys demonized for the criminal activities and objects of disdain for Sadr City's residents (Cockburn, 184). A government official from Prime Minister Maliki's political party described how the battle had hurt the reputation of the Sadrists:

“It is not the government who pressured the Sadrists into entering this agreement...It is the pressure from the people inside Sadr City and from their own people that will make them act more responsibly.” (Fadel, 2008)

A store owner in the district confirmed these feelings towards JAM:

“I used to support the Sadrists but after this latest fighting, I don't any more...We've seen what his people are doing. They hide in residential areas, launch rockets, and then the American planes come and bomb them. And it's the Sadrists who are responsible in the end for the deaths of ordinary civilians.” (Sly, 2008)

More so, their criminal tendencies had alienated many past tacit supporters, as their behavior had angered these fence sitters (Chiarelli & Michaelis, 2005). However, once the IG had pacified the district, these views shifted away from backing Mr Sadr, as evidenced in a statement by one resident noting that a charge on commerce was no longer in effect (“In...,” 2008). Another resident stated, quite plainly, that “The situation is very good right now.” (Londono & Raghavan, 2008). These depictions above show that the sentiment in Sadr City had clearly shifted as the battle came to a close. Mr Sadr and his militia were no longer viewed as saviors, but now as a malignant tumor that eventually had to be purged.

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Even outside Sadr City the civilians affected by the fighting stated their displeasure, with another Baghdad resident remarking, “Moqtada has lost a lot of popularity, because he's only harming the ordinary people” (Sly, 2008). As these accounts profess, Mr Sadr had lost the popular support that had carried him, and kept him safe, for so long. No longer was he the great champion of the people; rather, he had become a goon, appearing to be more focused on advancing himself over the interests of ordinary Iraqis. Subsequently, JAM realized its now dire situation, and sought to reverse the course to avoid becoming shoved aside in the new Iraq. As a result, they became even more threatening in their demeanor and dialogue, in a futile attempt to scare the people away from the coalescing Iraqi state (Owles- “Inside...,” 2008; Raghavan- “Caught...,” 2008). However, this last-ditch effort only showed their desperation and how much they had been both weakened and demoralized. Thus, the battle was not only a clear-cut military victory for the US and its Iraqi allies but also a political one in that they managed to persuade the local population to back them instead of the insurgents.

This sentiment was also evident in how the population had come to perceive their new protectors- the US military to an extent, but much more importantly, the ISF. Perhaps the biggest indicator of popular opinion is how the civilians may assist these units in fighting against the insurgents. The discussion of TTPs earlier made a point about how turning the populace can result in favorable help such as tips. This battle was characteristic of this change in attitude, as the residents of Sadr City began to do just that. CPT Ryan Williams of the US Army confirmed this inclination of the local residents to fight back in their own way against the insurgents. His observations show how the overarching US strategy to win over the people is beginning to bear fruit, and aiding the fight against this shadowy enemy:

“I think the people here are scared of [the Mahdi Army] and the special groups, and have had enough of this fighting...Since it started, we've gotten a steady stream of tips on weapons caches and the hide-outs- and they've proved accurate.” (“Shi’ite...,” 2008)

LT Millard Stewart, also of the US Army, noted that the population was no longer tacitly supporting the insurgents but actually actively backing the IG in its actions. One of these signs was that some were offering tips about the locations of enemy bomb emplacements, showing that they wanted to help the Iraqi and American forces in any way possible. The

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insurgents could no longer combat this, since the residents of the district had turned against them, seeking out the government and its agents instead (Owles- “Inside Sadr City: The...,” 2008). Clearly, the US military and fledgling IG had experienced a substantial boost in popularity as the battle wound down, since the populace had concluded that their actions were more beneficial than what was previously offered by the Sadrists.

These changes in the mindset of those in Sadr City are in many ways the best indicator of success in the district, as well as that of the Iraq War as a whole. Gina Chon, writing in the *Wall Street Journal*, described this new pattern:

“Until recently, the Mahdi Army had enjoyed widespread popular support...But its popularity began to wane in the past few months as some members turned increasingly to criminal activity such as taking control of gas stations and extorting money from merchants in exchange for protection.”
(Chon- “Radical...,” 2008)

This, in many ways, is the best description of how the situation in Iraq has improved greatly over where it was even just a year earlier. Instead of running to the militias and warlords for protection and basic social services, the people had begun to respect the government. That said, and even though the people no longer condoned the activities of JAM, there was still the possibility that this trend could collapse and that the mood could change at any moment, especially if the Coalition troops failed to respect these civilians (Chon- “Radical...,” 2008). If such a tragic turn of events were to manifest, the consequences would be painful, and the militia could very well be rejuvenated. Their support could become more steadfast than before amongst the populace and all the progress made might be erased. As such, it is imperative that the US military and its Iraqi allies seek to protect and perhaps even placate their new charges in order to avoid this reversal in conditions (Raghavan- “Shiites...,” 2008). Otherwise, this area, as well as others, could become a renewed stronghold for Mr Sadr, with the legitimacy of the IG would be jeopardy. In sum, the key to lasting success in Iraq is to perpetually and unceasingly strive to satisfy the people’s basic needs for security, prosperity, and continuity. Achieving these goals will stabilize the situation, and make it easier to go about maintaining the fledgling democracy of sorts in this country. In turn, this authority will be one that is in the people’s interests and with their backing.

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Rebuilding

Piggybacking on the concept of a battle won in terms of perceptions, the momentum evident had to be carried forward. Otherwise, the progress made could very well have been lost, with the IG discredited, the US military denigrated, and the insurgents emboldened and on the rise again. This means that the US and Iraqi forces cannot pull out, abandoning the district as before, since this will likely result in another void that would quickly be filled by another militia. The enemy will ruthlessly exploit this situation by slipping back in, and only become more difficult to defeat in the future. In turn, tangible and visible progress is an absolute necessity to maintaining the people's support and preventing them from turning back to support the insurgents again.

Consequently, US policymakers and IG officials instituted a comprehensive plan to rebuild the shattered district and prevent a power and progress vacuum from manifesting. They poured a great amount of money into the district, refurbishing infrastructure and working to restore jobs and overall economic advancement ("Iraqi...", 2008; Kitfield, 2008). This in turn will create, as one US general put it, "irreversible momentum," sealing over any hole that the insurgents could exploit (Londono- "In...", 2008). From there, the IG will be able to sustain its reputation, and maintain control over the district not by overt military means and a heavy-handed approach, but by bettering the peoples' lives. There will be no one else to seek out but the government, since it will have proven itself to be the best, and really only, source of assistance. This was something the insurgents had been able to provide in lieu of a legitimate governing body, yet they will have lost this ability with a strengthened state authority now in play.

One of the most interesting aspects of this battle is how quickly the clash could rapidly switch between violent conflict and humanitarian operations with heavy civilian interaction. The early parts of the fight were violent urban war, with a heavy military presence and extensive use of potent firepower (Londono & Paley- "In...", 2008). This open warfare ended once a truce, of sorts, between Mr Sadr and his forces and the IG was signed in early May (Gordon & Farrell- "In...", 2008). In turn, the situation rapidly changed to one where victory was no longer pushing the insurgents from their base of power but now filling in the void that was left

behind (“Maliki’s...,” 2008). As such, the IG and US military acted quickly to take advantage of this situation by pouring money and assets into rebuilding the shattered neighborhood. Key to this was the creation of neighborhood watches that provided uninvolved men who had previously joined militias with something else to do, in addition to a steady paycheck they so desperately wanted (Paley- “US...,” 2008). It was now time to co-opt these potential insurgents by offering jobs, stability, and significance, aspects lacking beforehand and central to maintaining their allegiance (Londono- “Iraq...,” 2008). Through these initiatives, the IG would be able to starve the insurgency of much of its manpower; before, these aggravated males felt they had no choice but to join militias. Now, the state would bring them back into society and offer them opportunities to enhance their lives, not resistant the state.

In sum, the move to swiftly fill the power vacuum and start the long, laborious process of getting the residents of Sadr City fully reintegrated into the new Iraqi society were efforts vital to sealing this victory. More so, these brought forth two important points about how this battle was different. One, the security situation was finally stable enough to enable such activities to transpire without fears of future destruction. Previously, such projects would be thwarted by the insurgents who saw the weak security situation as a perfect opening to attack what the government tried to accomplish. Next, by investing in the community and committing to the rebuilding, the insurgents would no longer have a source of consternation from which to draw power, support, and recruits. Instead, the IG had moved in as the protectors of the populace, securing their reputation as a force of good. The convergence of these two factors permitted the state to firmly establish its authority, since not only could its military defend national interests but could care for its citizens as well.

IMPACT ON IRAQ

“First, the government of Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki showed real backbone by undertaking major military operations that ultimately reclaimed the Baghdad neighborhood of Sadr City...Iraq’s government now controls almost all of the country for the first time since the overthrow of Saddam Hussein.”

-Jason Campbell, Michael O’Hanlon, and Amy Unikewicz, “The State of Iraq: An Update,” New York Times, 22 JUN 2008

As the battle came to a close through a truce with Mr Sadr and JAM agreeing to stop fighting if the US and Iraqi troops would stop their incursion, the results of this battle soon became clear. Though Mr Sadr was able to broker a ceasefire, he would gain no more ground and instead just lose much of the respect he had earned to the IG (“Maliki’s...,” 2008). In turn, the Iraqi state gained recognition as the only governing entity in Iraq, with a military able to carry out its will, and finally earning the esteem of the population. The government now had the means and capability to provide the services expected of a fully functioning nation, including stability and security. These two factors would serve to improve the country’s economic well-being and business climate, and help to provide for success for its citizens in everyday life. The confluence of these factors then worked to stymie future attempts by insurgents to gain control and influence.

Clearly, the biggest impact, and the one that has had the longest running reverberations, is that the IG gained supremacy over stateless militias and unofficial power brokers. Furthermore, three important results came about as this battle wound down. One, and perhaps the most telling indicator of how far Iraq and new government had progressed, was the fact that it had mostly been ISF troops doing the fighting (Tavernise & Moore, 2008). Whereas before the Americans took the lead in battles, committing the majority of the ground element and conducting most of the operation, the Iraqis were executing the main drives of mission this time around (Owles- “Iraq...,” 2008). They were not completely on their own, since they still had significant US assistance in terms of air power, combat support, and intelligence and targeting. That said, they were the ones who created the overarching plan for the battle and then initiated and conducted the fight directly against the militia. Through these actions, they

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worked to bring the will of the state into the fray, representing the IG and manifesting its goals.

More so, the fight showed how a strengthened IG and a capable ISF could force the militias and their leaders from the forefront of Iraqi politics and security, supplanting them with the authority of the state. Once this legitimacy was established by the results of this battle, as well as the clash further south in Basra, the militias had a more difficult stance to defend (Owles- "Iraq...", 2008). Not only was it politically and militarily a tenuous position; it now also became one that was hard to convince the populace to accept. They no longer presented a better answer to the offerings of the state, and thus lost much of their backing as they had come to be seen as criminal gangs ("Moqtada...", 2008). They no longer had the ability to depict themselves as the best way to better Iraqi society since the government now possessed the means and reputation to do this on its own. As such, the militias could either end their resistance, give up their power, and integrate with society or be ostracized or, even worse, be destroyed ("Leaders...", 2008). JAM was caught on the latter path and its influence was eliminated, along with much of Mr Sadr's sway on the Iraqi population.

Another influential result of this battle was the end of the reign of Moqtada al-Sadr. His enemy has become more legitimate in the eyes of Iraqis, while his militia was in tatters. More so, JAM was being pulled apart by the offers of peace and reconciliation, without retribution, presented by the IG (Fadel, 2008). The moderates realized that allying with the national government would be far more conducive to a better existence than senselessly fighting fruitless battle after fruitless battle. In contrast, the extremists would never allow themselves to submit to the authority of the state, and thus became targets for destruction. In turn, the former would be reintegrated with society and allowed to experience the benefits of normal Iraqi citizenship. The latter then would be cut off and eradicated, as they were far too much of a dangerous entity in that nation.

Additionally, Mr Sadr no longer had the ability to convince Iraqis that he could offer more than the state (Chon- "Radical...", 2008). In turn, he had to accept the new situation, for otherwise he could completely lose all freedom and sway that he might potentially possess. His militias had become uncontrollable, acting in a manner that only disgraced Mr Sadr's

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name and defamed his reputation, damaging his standing amongst the district, as well as throughout Iraq (Tavernise & Moore, 2008). Mr Sadr realized the need to transform JAM from a militant organization to one that sought to satisfy the needs of the people, since direct confrontation with the ISF was no longer productive (Oppel & Farrell, 2008). Further, the ability to have a civil group could allow him to retain some presence amongst the populace and at least burnish his reputation to an extent. All of these efforts, though, cannot hide the fact that he has been displaced by the newly potent Iraqi state, and that military power no longer rested in the hands of militias but in a capable government-sponsored security force (Tavernise, 2008). One important note of late is that the recent national elections in Iraq have brought Mr Sadr to the forefront again. Political organizations adherent to his point of view about Iraq gained significant blocks of vote, returning his ideals to the discussion and worrying some in the government of retribution if his supporters take seats in the parliament (Shadid- "Sadr's...", 2010). As such, Mr Sadr has not been wholly relinquished from the scene in Iraq, as evidenced by his influence on this recent vote; however, his military power has been entirely wiped out with the ISF as the sole respected armed force in the country.

In sum, this battle remade Iraq from what it was as a violent, chaotic, anarchic state filled with warring, popularly supported militias and shadowy but charismatic leaders exploiting a power void and an uncertain situation (Londono- "In...", 2008). At long last, the IG chose to move against these stateless and destabilizing groups, using force as required in order to remove them from their positions of influence. Though US support was necessary, and will be needed for the time being, the very fact that the government actually struck back against its enemies is a significant sign of progress. More so, the state refused to back down despite the travails it faced, fighting through the resistance to its initiatives and firmly establishing itself as the legitimate governing entity in Iraq (Londono & Raghavan, 2008). The insurgency was now on the run, facing a debilitating loss in popular support as the people defected to the government for the new services and renewed security that it could now provide. In its place the IG had moved to fill the void that militias had previously occupied, and could legitimately do so since it had proven that it could offer security and stability.

RISKS GOING FORWARD

“In Sadr City, the Iraqi military also prevailed after two American battalions occupied the southernmost districts, firing numerous Hellfire missiles and carrying out Predator strikes. The Iraqis were able to negotiate a peaceful occupation of the rest of Sadr City, but the hard military groundwork had been laid by the Americans.”

-Michael R Gordon, “The Last Battle,” New York Times, 03 AUG 2008

In all this though, several aspects could still bring about trouble going forward. Perhaps most damaging, especially to a government that is just now earning respect, is that the IG is unable to sustain the momentum it has created here in cementing itself as the preeminent, and ultimately only, power in Iraq. Additionally, the US military is still heavily involved in military operations, tasks the ISF must learn to conduct on its own if full and complete security is ever to be provided by that force. Lastly, and really the most dangerous situation that could develop is that the people become upset with the direction and demeanor of the government. Consequently, militias may return, and unofficial leaders such as Mr Sadr could be revitalized, moving Iraq back to where it was before this battle concluded, disrupting the progress made and stability achieved.

One risk with the most potential for destabilization is that the IG loses the momentum that it has built up in the last few years. In turn, the populace no longer trusts it, or views it as a legitimate governing authority, reducing its ability to secure Iraq and operate in the manner expected of a national government. That is, the IG must ensure that it deliver on its commitments, promises, and responsibilities. This will help enormously in cementing the reputation of the government as a force of good for the people (Kitfield, 2008). If this does not happen, the IG will likely lose the respect that it has earned, since the population will come to view it as ineffective. More so, the IG cannot act in an apathetic manner that does not take the peoples’ wishes into account. Otherwise, it will soon be viewed as just another despotic regime, which is exactly what Iraq suffered under for a quarter century prior. Lastly, the government must strive to keep control over the areas it has pacified, and keep the residents of these regions safe from future harm. A safe and stable society is vital to the survival of the current way of running Iraq and the high-level officials executing this policy. A situation that devolves into strife and conflict serves to empower irregular militias and

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marauding warlords, and these groups and figures may very well take full advantage of these circumstances. They will exploit the uncertainty, just as Mr Sadr did, and run amok in a weakly governed state (Gordon & Farrell- "Iraqi...", 2008). From there, Iraq will devolve into tribal antagonism over disparate regions, dooming all attempts to bring peace and prosperity to the country. All of the progress made will likely be erased as the government loses legitimacy, resulting in a terrifying situation where stateless actors rule personal fiefdoms and their armed minions pitilessly administer the will of these strongmen.

Finally, the heavy dependence of the ISF on the US military, despite the progress made and gains achieved recently by that fledgling force, is a situation that must be improved. If this does not occur, the IG will never be able to effectively achieve its goals if its military cannot operate in the manner expected of a modern force. More so, it is imperative that it develop a wide range of abilities so that it can competently combat irregular armed groups and terrorist operatives. At the time of the battle, the ISF was reasonably capable of conducting ground operations and taking and holding ground against the militias. However, the intelligence to drive these maneuvers and targeting information to efficiently eliminate militia leadership, in addition to the logistics chain, are all still lacking. Further, the ISF is not fully up to speed in terms of executing close air support missions and striking the enemy from on high with an advanced air force to back its ground units (Campbell et al, 2008; Gordon- "The...", 2008). Until these aspects are developed, the IG will not have the tools required to fully and completely attack and defeat its enemies. Thus, these are deficiencies that have to be rectified, though once they are, the new government should be able to sustain and defend itself.

In conclusion, Iraq has made much progress in the last few years, after a terrible period of time spent wandering in the wilderness. Neither the US nor the Iraqis could figure out originally how to stabilize and secure the country through the establishment of an effective governing body that met the peoples' needs. It was also difficult to figure out how to fight an enemy that lived amongst the populace and drew from it much of its support, both politically and materially. In turn, tragic missteps and chaotic violence ensued, until the root causes were realized and appropriate tactics formulated. Once this occurred, though, and the people

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became tired of terroristic thugs and criminal gangs led by self-serving leaders running roughshod about the country, the tide of the war turned. The US military figured out how to isolate the extremists from the moderates, and fight only as much as was required. The IG in turn worked with the US policymakers and leaders to build a capable ISF and create a government that could ably protect and support the citizens of the country. As these factors converged, the situation began to move in the direction that these entities wanted, and they were able to demolish the resolve of the insurgency. From there Iraq has become more peaceful, though not completely free of strife and trouble, with the peoples' lives improving as the leaders of the nation seek to better conditions. Now, it is possible to permit the IG act independently, and the US can begin to drawn down its presence.

KEY FINDINGS

“A little over two weeks ago, U.S. troops in Sadr City were on the front lines of fierce, unrelenting urban warfare. But virtually overnight, their main mission has become one of rebuilding portions of the vast, tattered Shiite district and building trust in neighborhoods where many residents despise Americans.”

-Ernesto Londono, “In Sadr City, U.S. Mission Shifts From Urban Warfare to Reconstruction,” Washington Post, 01 JUN 2008

Going forward, there are three important aspects regarding how to fight a modern counterinsurgency to be discussed. This battle vividly exhibited the successful employment of them that allowed US and Iraqi military forces to salvage what might have become an untenable situation. The first of these is that the strategy for operations of this type must be persistent, consistent, and, most importantly, patient. This finally occurred in Sadr City after five years of indecision and vacillation. The first part of this notion deals with the idea that if one is not constantly there, demonstrating a desire to be involved in everyday life, a power vacuum will form. American and Iraqi military forces had abandoned the district to Mr Sadr soon after the major military operations of the Iraq War ended. They basically let his influence flow freely and his militia members run rampant, such that they quickly and decisively seized control of the district. The insurgents subsequently slipped into this void, changing the views of the populace by fundamentally disparaging the foreign military forces and new government. In turn, it is vital to always be present, living in the area and moving amongst the people on a regular, friendly basis, seeking to win their approval and aid them in any way possible. Secondly, it is necessary to be consistent in conducting this policy, for otherwise the population will become confused, and may even reject these forces. The IG ordered the US military to pull out, after occupying strategic locations in the vicinity of the district, which instilled a spirit of uncertainty in the populace. They had no idea of the IG's policies in the district, and thus they no longer trusted the government to do the right thing, turning to the Sadrists instead. As such, military units cannot swing back and forth drastically between hard power and violent operations and then try to be an agency set on rebuilding. Nor can these units fail to appreciate the threats and act accordingly, focusing on purely soft power instead and civil matters. Rather, one must formulate a course of action that is logical and sensible considering the setting, and then stick to this, adjusting as conditions dictate, but

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not dramatically altering the state of affairs unless warranted. It is the most difficult task in the world to figure out when the strategy is failing and thus in need of revamp, without acting too soon when making such a decision. The tipping point requires looking at the determinants of the outcome and making the proper changes in the course of action that are also timed correctly given the circumstances. This in turn prevents insurgents from exploiting inconsistencies and using them against the executors, as this could both quickly unravel the scheme implemented and fail to account for the will of the people. Lastly, this type of policy demands patience, which was not immediately realized as key to securing and stabilizing Sadr City. When this certainty was finally understood, the situation turned around and it became much easier to establish an official, sanctioned presence that has since lasted. The insurgents have all the time in the world, and are perfectly willing to pass the rebellion on to the next generation. In contrast, foreign entrants, especially democratic nations, have to deal with the logistical, political, and societal issues of such a campaign. Consequently, they have a finite time span and limited tolerance for protracted military expeditions. Subsequently, military units must hit hard and be direct in lancing their opponents, yet also be willing to sit back and let the situation develop as required. If they try to force it, it can become very difficult to isolate the extremists from the moderates, and the population could become quite hard-hearted. Thus, it is imperative that policy deciders and military planners have the nerve and audacity to hold off as necessary when conducting hasty operations and instead look forward to seek the plan that will yield the most favorable results. Only then will this strategy bear fruit, since the enemy has very little sense of time, and bringing the local population into the fold requires great effort that comes to fruition only after a long while. When this finally transpired in Sadr City, the legitimacy of the IG was established and the insurgents' presence was cleansed.

A second major aspect to consider when effecting a counterinsurgency is that the execution of this strategy must be restrained, methodical, and rational. Being restrained is central to success in COIN for several reasons. As mentioned repeatedly beforehand, killing the enemy is not the way that these types of war are deemed a victory; success is defined by winning the will of the people. Additionally, a wide-ranging, hard-charging force will only serve to alienate the population by disrupting the everyday life that they want to lead. At times it

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proved necessary to drop the hammer on JAM, but generally, only a few targeted strikes were in order. Concerns over collateral damage and their effects reaching far into the populace and upsetting them would have far more negative results than the gain from killing a few insurgents. In turn, holding back, and fighting only when it actually is to one's advantage-avoiding a massive and overwhelming response to enemy provocations in the process-became the way to win the people over. Then the residents subsequently sought to provide the assistance required to isolate and purge this cancer, but only because the relationship is reciprocal. Next, these plans only pan out when conducted in a methodical manner. That means that everyone is on the same page, and that throughout the AO the strategy is put into play in the same manner. If not, the insurgents will slide between the gaps, waiting for the right moment to expose these faults and make the most of this fortuitous opportunity. As noted, being consistent, which was not the case at first in Sadr City, magnifies the impact of this policy. Otherwise, the worst fears are realized as these malignant elements incite the population and hit in the weak points that should not have existed if the plan had played out in a detailed, systematic manner. Finally, one must be rational in formulating these policies. Creating an effective scheme requires knowledge of the AO, its population, and the enemy faced. The US military finalized realized that Mr Sadr and his minions were the cornerstone of the hostility in the district, so to win the populace meant discrediting them. Since the militia members had already become more criminal in the activities and bearing, this task proved to be easier, and fit well in splitting these extreme elements from the moderates. Once these subversive groups are wiped out, it is easier to reestablish governmental control. Further, one must define what is representative of victory, and how the desired goals match up with the possible outcomes given the situation and its circumstances and conditions. In turn, the scheme to combat an insurgency should be created with feasible, reasonable, and achievable objectives that take into full account the battlefield and all of the players, as well as other facilitators and obstacles. The US came to grips with this philosophy after years of missteps and misdirection. Once it became clear, though, they were able to exploit the distinct differences between the hard-core fighters driven by their ideology and the ones seeking to lead a normal and safe life. Only then will such a strategy succeed and bear fruit, as it requires evaluating all the many facets when figuring out how to win.

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The last major aspect of productive counterinsurgencies is that violence is not the answer; rather, winning the proverbial hearts and minds and constructing an environment that is conducive to such a state is the road that must be traveled. Perhaps the most difficult part of this policy for a military organization is that it must hold back, a challenge in the past rarely faced and a requirement seldom placed upon them before. As such, creating ROE that match up with the situation and desired results, and disseminating and confirming a purpose that is clear and coherent are necessary guides. If these parameters are not set in place, uncertainty arises and the force operates in a fuzzy situation with no idea of how to conduct itself. It must maintain security, but the balance must also be struck between effective counterattacks and striking preemptively as needed yet knowing that any actions undertaken have effects, sometimes counterproductive and undesired, on the populace. In Sadr City, technology such as aerial weaponry and carefully planned raids, in addition to extensive civil affairs programs and economic assistance, were major influencers. Once the people realized the benefit of rejecting the insurgency, they wanted to take advantage of that which the IG had to offer, instead of the perverse methodology of the Sadrists. This chasm that formed between the two is suggestive of the types of people found in an insurgency-wracked AO. On one side are the extremists and their devotees- these are the ones executing operations against the government and its agents and must be eradicated in order to establish security and stability. Supporting them, both tacitly as well as, to an extent, openly, are those who believe in their ideals but may not be willing to take up arms but do provide materiel, information, and hiding places. These are those who should be turned, since while they have a vested interest in these anti-government entities, they are not fully entwined, and as a result could be brought back into the mainstream. Then, on the other side of the spectrum, are those supportive of the government and its goals. These adherents trust this authority and seek to help it advance its initiatives, even if it involves risking life and other personal matters. Though not as zealous of those openly backing the state, there are some who generally agree with the government's activities, and do not care for the actions of those who oppose it. They want this governing body to succeed, but are not as willing to risk life, liberty, and personal advancement to see its objectives attained. Even so, they are already on the side of the state, so they must be kept in that mindset to avoid losing them to the insurgency. Lastly, and in the middle, are those who

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are not banking their whole standing on one or the other wing, and as such, are waiting for one or the other to come out ahead. Once this has been determined, they will make their commitment, so it is vital for the government to show progress if it wants to win the espousal of those undecided. In sum, keeping an even keel and steering clear of the pitfalls of provocation and blanket violent activities are how a military force can disrupt an insurgency. The people in the AO are the way by which victory can be found, and only if their hopes and fears are understood can operations be created and put into action in a manner that protects them and permits them to prosper.

FINAL THOUGHTS

“The story of the Mahdi Army's decline follows the same pattern as al Qaeda's: Not only was it routed militarily, it also made itself noxious to the very Shiite population it purported to represent and defend. It enforced its heavy-handed religious edicts, coupled with mob-like extortion tactics, wherever it assumed effective control. The overwhelming Shiite rejection of this brand of politics is another piece of good news from Iraq, as it means that Iraqis will not tolerate Iranian-style theocratic rule.”

-Max Boot, “The Truth About Iraq's Casualty Count,” Wall Street Journal, 03 MAY 2008

In the end, this battle can be considered a victory for the US as well as the IG, and a devastating, almost fatal blow, both to Mr Sadr and to the power and sway of the militias. The first two groups managed to freeze the influence and impact that JAM and other informal and illegal military organizations had had on Iraqi politics and life. The last two entities fell from power, thrown down both violently by military force and figuratively by the Iraqi populace who no longer wished to deal with their menace (West, 323). Subsequently, the Iraqi state was strengthened, and the various actors in this great play for its society became less keen on showing their might with guns. As one looks at Iraq now, it will never be a Jeffersonian democracy, thriving in the mold of Western republics. However, it has been pacified in many regards, while much progress, both in terms of basic governance and the overall stabilization that has been achieved and now it seen as a better example of rule by law in the Middle East (Campbell et al, 2008 & 2009). Great strides have been made since the dark days of 2004 and 2005, when Mr Sadr seemed sure to control the country. These prove how the results of this battle in many ways are the best indicators of the growth in the strength of the IG.

Therefore, based upon the new definitions of victory that have arisen in the defining what signifies achievement in the ambiguities of modern warfare, this was one for the US (West, 133). It may not seem as if it were an exemplary military accomplishment in the traditional terms of enemy casualties and land taken. On the other hand, it is if the metrics are that of having destroyed the base of support for these insurgents and in winning back the populace's trust (Kagan- “Choosing...,” 2007; Ricks, 162; West, 321). Winning now depends on what is sought when the objectives are decided, and in this case, the goals were clearly met, even if

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they did not seem to be as they would be in terms of traditional metrics. In sum, determining what constitutes victory is central to waging an intelligent and productive counterinsurgency (Ricks, 283). Vague or outdated parameters will only bog down the efforts and destroy relations with the people involved. Instead, it is important to decide the goals that will be pursued, in light of the capabilities of those executing the course of action, and then go forward from there (West, 319). The US and IG finally figured this out, after years of tragedy and chaos, and once these guidelines were established, the fight finally turned in their favor.

Lastly, time is the one weapon that is so difficult to employ, as the will to fight, especially in the domestic arena amongst the politicians overseeing the war, can be short and easily swayed. Retired Navy Captain Rosemary Mariner described this difficult balance: “A democratic republic fighting an unpopular war, with limited war aims, for an unlimited time period is a bad combination” (Ricks, 307). Yet, the paradox of this matter is that it is sometimes good to wait, as the strategies involved in COIN take time to pan out. Thus, it is a priority that a strategy be created, goals established, and progress sought, while taking into account the situation. If not, the initiative will fail no matter the efforts and resources put into it. An assistant to LTG Ray Odierno, the ground commander in Iraq at the time, MAJ James Powell, noted that “The American military is trying to persuade the American people that this is going to take a long time, and we have to be clear and deliberate in our goals.” This sentiment was confirmed by COL Pete Mansoor, the executive officer to GEN David Petraeus when he was the ground commander in Iraq: “The United States has got to be willing to be underwrite this effort for many, many years to come” (Ricks, 315). In sum, time is vital to winning these types of wars, so the onus lies on the commanders to be willing to wait and let the situation develop. To do with efficacy requires the decision makers to have the intestinal fortitude to accomplish this desired end state. Then it is possible to go about taking advantage of the vulnerabilities and downfalls of one’s adversaries as they occur. It is also feasible to try and prompt such activity without losing the populace to the enemy, potentially winning the population over and destroying much the insurgency’s base of support.

In conclusion, COIN is perhaps the most difficult military challenge today, but as seen in the US military’s victory over Mr Sadr and JAM in Sadr City, is possible to achieve a desirable

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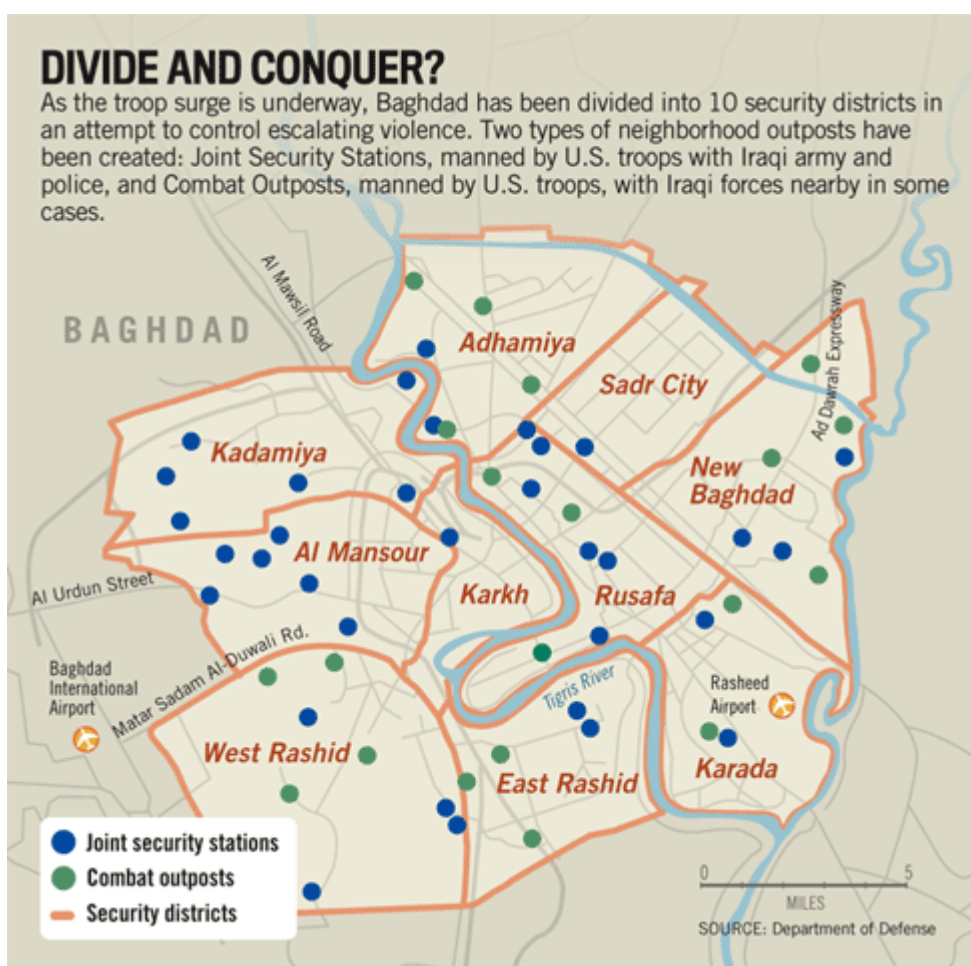
product. However, such policies must consider the population and how to win them over, the importance of holding back and applying violence only when and where necessary and needed, and that only a sensible plan applied persistently and consistently will lead to victory. Nature abhors a vacuum, so it is a paramount, even overriding, principle that a strong yet also scaled military presence is established in order to prevent insurgent elements from slipping in and gaining a foothold. This can be mitigated by locating oneself with the populace and constantly patrolling in order to inhibit these incursions. Otherwise, these are very likely to transpire, and once such a group has established itself as the preeminent body in that locale, it becomes increasingly difficult to displace. This is the case since they have become ingratiated with the population, and often have poisoned their thinking. Therefore, fortune favors the bold, and a combination of initiative and intelligence is how an insurgency will be destroyed. In Sadr City, the US and Iraqi militaries at last took down the militias, since the IG was finally willing to take a stand against them. As a result, understanding the AO and the actors are the ways by which this strategy will produce that which is sought, and allow for one to win in the end.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A – Maps

Figure 1: Map of the Neighborhoods of Baghdad, Showing the Location of Sadr City

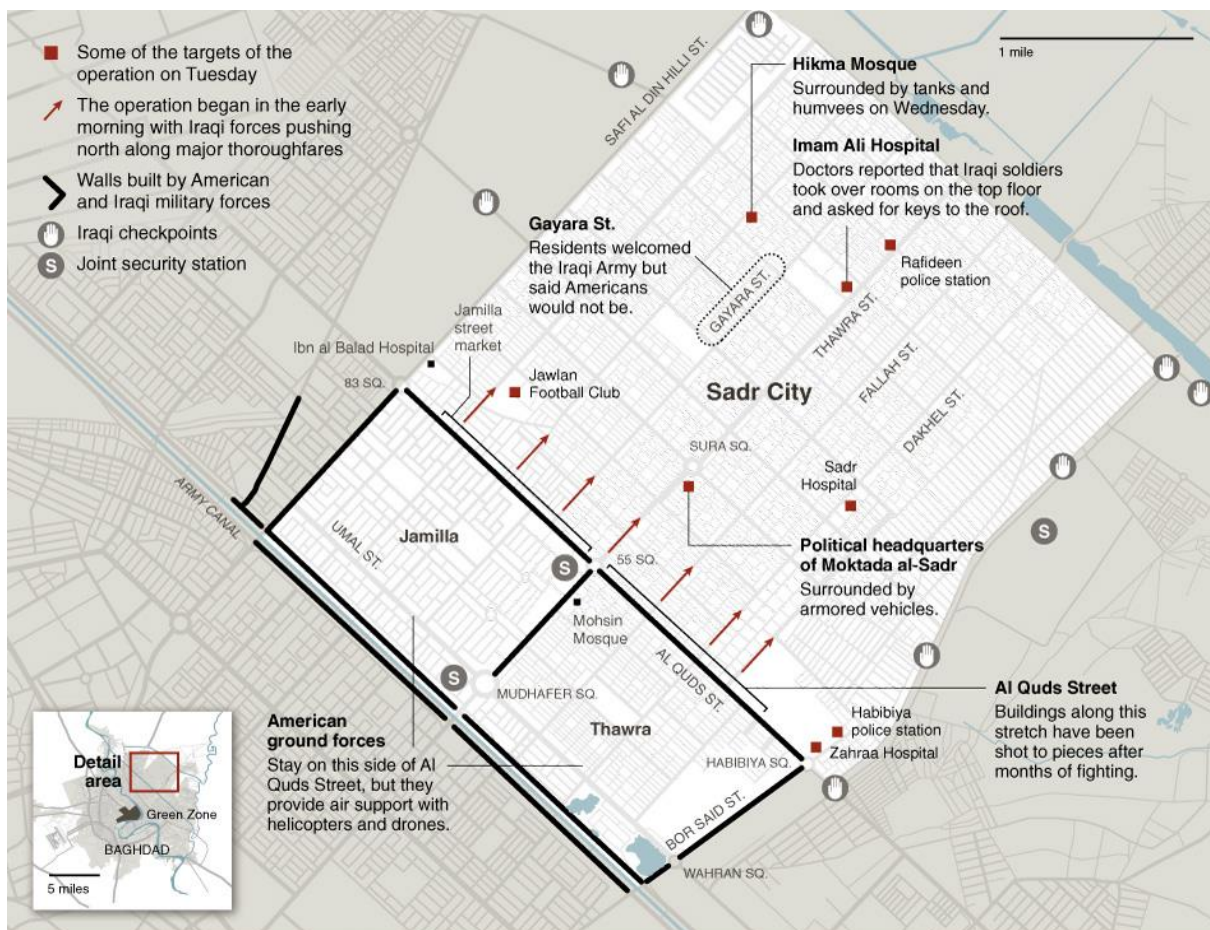


Source: http://www.usnews.com/usnews/images/news/graphics/Baghdad_dist_map.gif

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Figure 2: General Layout and Location of Significant Military Operations and Objectives

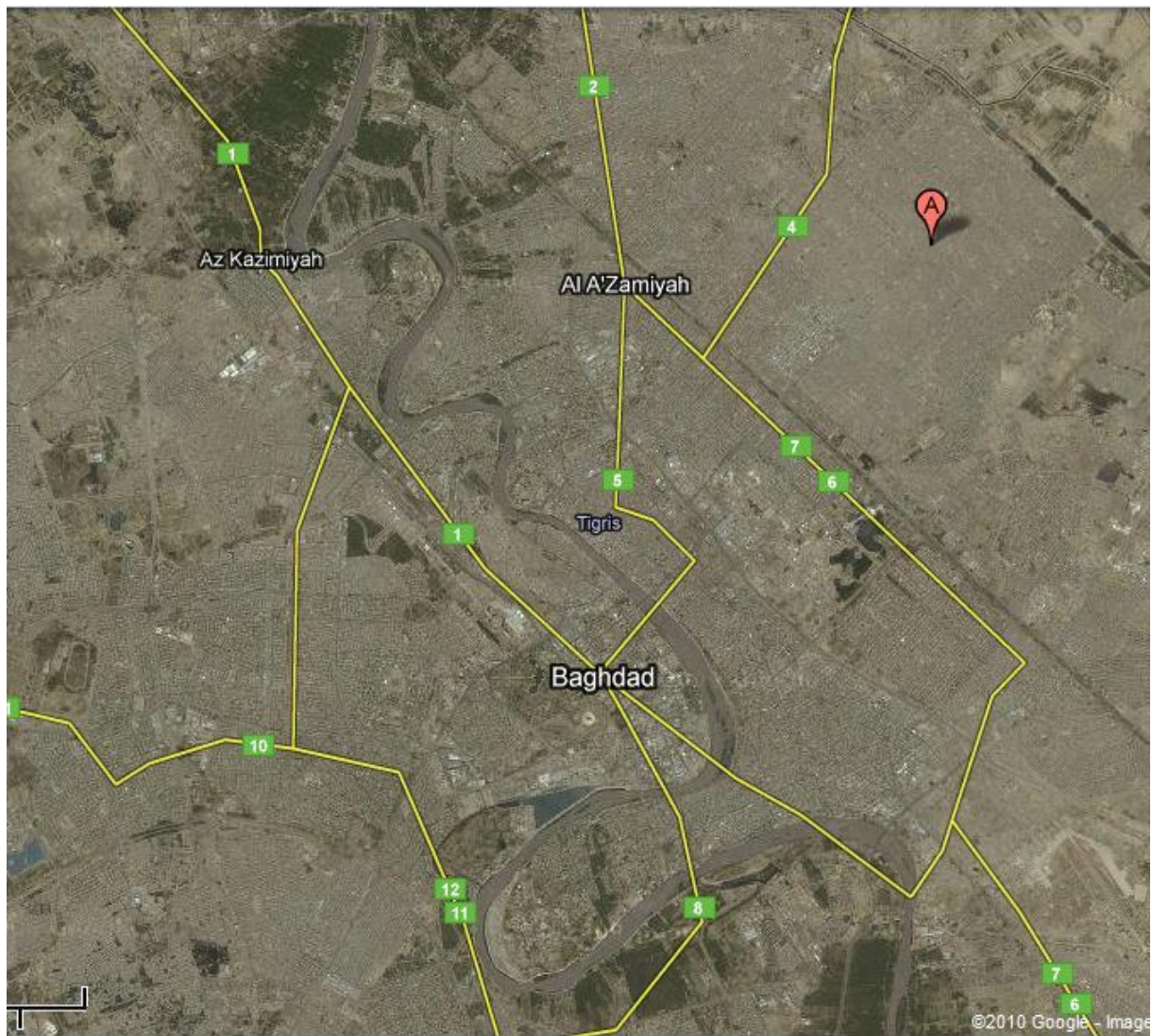


Source: Multinational Division Baghdad

JOE BURGESS, STEPHEN FARRELL, MICHAEL R. GORDON, QAIS MIZHER AND ARCHIE TSE /THE NEW YORK TIMES

Source: http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2008/05/20/world/middleeast/20080520_SADRCITY_GRAPHIC.html

Figure 3: Satellite Image of the Location of Sadr City in the Baghdad Urban Area



Source: *Google Maps*

Figure 4: Satellite Image of Sadr City



Source: *Google Maps*

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Appendix B – Chronology

(Sourced from the Multi-National Corps- Iraq and Multi-National Corps- Baghdad Public Affairs Offices- <http://www.dvidshub.net>)

March

The fighting began in this month as US and ISF military units responded to the insurgent's provocation as they launched indirect and direct fire attacks on the Green Zone as well as on other assets of Coalition forces. Further, numerous weapons caches containing a great variety of types of war-making implements, including artillery and mortar rounds EFPs, RPGs, explosive materiel, and ammunition were located

25- Insurgent attacks on IA checkpoints and a political party's headquarters in Sadr City led to reinforcement from additional IA units as well as Coalition forces. Additionally, a dozen mortar and rocket attacks on Baghdad were launched from the district.

27- Two insurgents moving about Sadr City were killed by helicopter-launched missile, while another fighter directing mortar fire was killed by US ground forces

28- Seven insurgents were killed when attacking a US Army checkpoint in Sadr City with small arms and RPGs

29- Two insurgents in the midst of emplacing IEDs were killed by US forces in Sadr City, while seven more fighters were killed in a firefight with US forces at a checkpoint

April

As the fighting began to wind down, innumerable weapons caches consisting of a panoply of war-making materiel including ammunition, rifles, machine guns, and explosive agents were discovered during raids and cordon and search operations.

5- An IA unit in addition to Iraqi civilians were attacked by an insurgent attack consisting of small-arms fire and RPGs in Sadr City, resulting in two Iraqis wounded

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11- At least five insurgents sniping, firing RPGs, and launching small-arms attacks against US forces were killed in Sadr City after the American convoy was ambushed with IEDs

16- Insurgent forces launched a rocket attack on Coalition forces that missed, killing one civilian and wounded another ten in Sadr City

17- Iraqi Army units set-up and manned a medical care station, aiding a vast array of Sadr City residents as the violence in the district began to wane

19- Coalition and insurgent forces clashed in Sadr City, killing one militiaman, while five more fighters were killed by a Hellfire missile driving a vehicle later in the night

21- Two insurgents struck at a US Army outpost, leading to a response by the American soldiers in which both attackers were killed. Later in the day, five insurgents were killed by Hellfire missiles as they prepared rocket launch sites and another was wounded in Sadr City as US forces responded to this threat

26- Two insurgents served as IED triggermen were killed by a Hellfire missile in Sadr City while another two fighters were killed by another Hellfire missile later in the night. Earlier in the day, two insurgents transferring weapons between vehicles with another pair of fighters were killed by a Hellfire missile

27- One insurgent was killed observing a vehicle route in Sadr City in order to detonate IEDs, while another one fled after US forces launched a Hellfire missile at them

28- Seven insurgents were killed in Sadr City by US forces using Hellfire missiles and the weapons of the M1A2 Abrams MBT

29- Five insurgents were killed by Hellfire missiles and other means as they attacked US forces stationed in Sadr City

30- Five insurgents were killed by US forces attempting to conduct a rocket attack in Sadr City, while another three militia members were eliminated by a Hellfire missile when fleeing in a vehicle

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May

Through the month, many weapons caches consisting of weapons, ammunition, rockets, grenades, IEDs, EFPs, and other war-making materiel were discovered in Sadr City. Additionally, the wall separating Sadr City into two parts in an effort to stymie the flow of insurgents and their weapons was constructed.

- 1- Hellfire missile attacks and fire from an M1A2 Abrams MBT killed two insurgents and scared off multiple more fighters in Sadr City
- 3- Two insurgents killed by a Hellfire missile after attacking a US Army position in Sadr City
- 4- Three insurgents were killed by a Hellfire missile in Sadr City after launching a rocket attack, with another three insurgents killed by Hellfire missile after launching a small arms and RPG attack
- 5- Insurgents launched an attack on a US Army position and were killed after a Hellfire missile was launched against them. Six more insurgents were killed when attacking a join US Army and IA position in Sadr City, while at another position in the district a Hellfire missile attack drove off a militia assault
- 7- One insurgent was killed by US forces after launching a small-arms attack on them in Sadr City. Seven Iraqis were wounded after a rocket attack, which led the US forces to fire a Hellfire missile to destroy an insurgent who launched the strike
- 8- Two Iraqi civilians were killed and eight more wounded when a rocket launched by the insurgents struck a residence in Sadr City. Further, four insurgents were killed by an M1A2 Abrams MBT and a Hellfire missile after launching small-arms and rocket attacks during the early morning hours
- 9- Two men were killed and four more were wounded by Hellfire missiles launched by Coalition forces in Sadr City after launching a rocket attack on the district. Six more insurgents were killed after launching IED, RPG, and small arms attacks against US forces

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10- US forces attacked with after an EFP attack launched by the militiamen failed, killing four insurgents while responding to the threat. Three more insurgents were killed as they attacked US forces elsewhere in Sadr City, plus mortar equipment and another militia member and rocket materiel on a rooftop

11-12- US Army combat outpost at southern edge of Sadr City attacked but the assault is stopped by the American forces

14- Bridge used by militiamen to transport weapons to Sadr City destroyed in an attempt to staunch the ability of the militias to conduct military operations against Coalition forces

17- US soldiers attacked by militiamen, killing three with small arms

30- Sadr City residents protest US discussions with the IG about the Status of Forces Agreement

June

Through the month, more weapons caches consisting of weapons, ammunition, rockets, grenades, IEDs, EFPs, and other war-making materiel were discovered in Sadr City

2-4- First group of Neighborhood Guard program members trained in Sadr City in order to take over security operations from ISF units

5- Four members of a special group were killed when loading weapons into their vehicle by a Hellfire missile

13- 1500 Iraqis gather in Sadr City to protest the Status of Forces Agreement and US military presence in and around the district

15- High-level insurgent leader and IED mastermind known to be operating in Sadr City captured in Baghdad

24- Two Coalition soldiers and two civilian assistants killed by an explosion in Sadr City which also wounded one more Coalition soldier and three more civilians

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Appendix C – Key Players

US:

Secretary of Defense Dr Robert Gates- head of the US Department of Defense during this battle and in the period leading up to it, he pushed forward the change in US war-fighting policy as well as the new strategic concept in Iraq and the boost in troop numbers.

GEN David Petraeus- the US ground commander at the time of the battle and main architect of the US Army's new COIN strategy as well as the Surge.

US Military Units Involved:

-3rd Brigade Combat Team (BCT), 4th Infantry Division

-1st Squadron, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment

-4th BCT, 10th Mountain Division

Iraqi Government:

Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki- the leader of the Iraqi Government during this time and the one who first launched the assault its Mr Sadr, eventually leading it through to a full conclusion. A Shi'ite, he is a major political rival of Mr Sadr and head of one of the main Shia organizations in the country.

Iraqi Military Units Involved:

-42nd Brigade (BDE), 11th Iraqi Army (IA) Division

-24th BDE, 6th IA Division

Sadr Party / Jayesh al-Mahdi:

Muqtada al-Sadr- the young Shi'ite cleric and leader of the Sadr Party and its militia, JAM, he had previously instigated fights with the US military and Iraqi Government, ending the fights before they claimed him. He would see his power and influence wane as the Iraqi

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Government moved against him and prosecuted its campaign against him until he was pushed out of his position.

Components:

-Sadr Party- the political wing of Mr Sadr's movement seeking to gain government positions and standing with the whole population of Iraq

-*Jayesh al-Mahdi*- the military wing and irregular militia of Mr Sadr's movement seeking to protect the people as death squads roamed Iraq and to also advance Mr Sadr and his party's interests and political objectives

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Appendix D – Glossary

1SG- *First Sergeant*- the senior enlisted leader of the 50 to 200 person maneuver unit known as a company responsible for the care of welfare of the soldiers of that entity and possessing a wealth of experience

ADM- *Admiral*- the highest rank in the US Navy, and, like a General in the US Army, generally responsible for broad, far-reaching, wide-ranging planning and policy making and setting

AO- *area of operations*- the region which a certain US military unit hold responsibility for all the occurs in it, and is thus the most knowledgeable American source on that district

BDE- *Brigade*- a military formation consisting of multiple battalions, sometimes homogeneous and sometimes not, and the building block for regiments and subsequently divisions, and tasked with holding key locations during military maneuvers

BCT- *Brigade Combat Team*- an integrated US Army unit consisting of infantry, armor, cavalry, artillery, support, transport, and aviation assets tasked with controlling significant areas on the battlefield and conducting large-scale military operations, serving as the basic building block of a division

CF- *Coalition forces*- the other military forces allied with the US in Iraq

COIN- *counterinsurgency*- military and political actions taken to combat the threat of irregular, stateless militias and martial strongmen

CPT- *Captain*- a mid-level US Army rank responsible for staff functions and command of a 50 to 200 person maneuver unit known as a company

GEN- *General*- the highest rank in the US Army, and generally responsible for broad, far-reaching, wide-ranging planning and policy making and setting

IA- *Iraqi Army*- the ground force component of the Iraqi Security Forces

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ID- *Infantry Division*- a large US Army unit consisting of at least 10,000 soldiers and tasked with securing large swaths of territory and providing forces for major military operations

IED- *improvised explosive device*- a variety of bombs made from various military materiel used to strike against both mobile and immobile elements without necessarily exposing the user to the risk of immediate retaliation, and a favored weapon of the insurgency in Iraq

IFV- *infantry fighting vehicle*- a wheeled or tracked military machine with relatively high levels of mobility, protection, and armament used to transport soldiers safely and quickly as needed

IG- *Iraqi Government*- the legitimate governing authority of the nation of Iraq, led by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki

ISF- *Iraqi Security Forces*- Iraq's national military and police

JAM- *Jayesh al-Mahdi- the Mahdi Army*- the Shia militia based out of Sadr City and headed by Moqtada al-Sadr, and opposed to the Iraqi Government

JCS- *Joint Chiefs of Staff*- the governing council of the US military made up of senior leaders from all branches and tasked with setting general policy and establishing high-level goals and guidelines

LT- *Lieutenant*- a junior US military officer tasked with planning assistance and generally commander of a small maneuver unit of 15 to 50 personnel known as a platoon

LTC- *Lieutenant Colonel*- a senior position in the US Army responsible for staff operations and command of a 500 to 1000 person maneuver unit known as a battalion

LTG- *Lieutenant General*- the second-highest rank in the US Army focused on command of large-scale maneuver units and high-level planning and operations

MAJ- *Major*- a mid-level rank in the US Army focused on staff planning and functioning

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MBT- *main battle tank*- the most heavily armored and well-armed vehicle used by modern military forces today with the best protected and most powerful weapons

MiTT- *Military Transition Teams*- US military members embedded with ISF units to advise them and improve their operational functioning and efficacy

OMS- *Office of Moqatada-al Sadr*- the official front for the activities perpetuated by Moqtada al-Sadr

RADM- *Rear Admiral*- a high-level, general-equivalent rank in the US Navy responsible for planning and some command functions

ROE- *rules of engagement*- the guidelines by which US military units operate when fighting

SOF- *Special Operations Forces*- elite US military units tasked with unconventional war-fighting capabilities and advisory services to foreign militaries

TTPs- *tactics, techniques, and procedures*- the various means and methods employed by a military unit to engage in warfare

UAV- *unmanned aerial vehicle*- a remotely-piloted aircraft that provides both intelligence-gathering and target-development and offensive capabilities, at less cost and size than most human-occupied airplanes and helicopters

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Appendix E – Summaries of Key Resources

Blogs:

Baghdad Bureau: Iraq From the Inside- a *New York Times*-staffed media source, this provided good information about conditions inside Sadr City and how the battle impacted the local populace.

Michael J Totten- a freelance journalist widely published, Mr Totten has mainly pro-US views and while casting a critical eye on some of the American policies in Iraq, has generally been in favor of the endeavor. His writings provided good insight into how Sadr City has fared in the fighting and also noting some US successes, including its exceptional demeanor and care, that other media sources tend to overlook or ignore.

Small Wars Journal- two insightful articles, “The Counterinsurgency Cliff Notes: Techniques for the Conventional Rifle Platoon, in Layman’s Terms” by Craig Coppock, a Captain in the US Army, and “Twenty-Eight Articles” by Dr David Kilcullen, an Australian military officer provided good information about COIN TTPs as well as suggestions as to how to win a conflict such as the one in Iraq.

Books:

No True Glory by Bing West

Written by a former US Marine, this book details early US struggles in Iraq.

Muqtada: Muqtada al-Sadr, the Shia Revival, and the Struggle for Iraq by Patrick Cockburn

A biography of the main antagonist of the US military and Iraqi Government during the battle, this work discusses Mr Sadr’s background and also the reasons for his disdain for the American forces and the authority that they back.

The Gamble by Thomas Ricks

This analysis looks at how the new US strategy for Iraq changed the course of the war for the better and stabilized what was an rapidly destabilizing country.

Journal Writings:

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“How to Leave a Stable Iraq: Building on Progress” by Stephen Biddle, Michael E O’Hanlon, and Kenneth M Pollack in *Foreign Affairs*

This article is a useful guide on how to sustain a political victory once the military one is won.

“How to Win in Iraq” by Andrew F Krepenenich Jr in *Foreign Affairs*

An article by an expert in COIN, this piece pushes several of the strategies, including a more focused COIN policy and more military personnel, later implemented in Iraq.

“Principles, Imperatives, and Paradoxes of Counterinsurgency” by Eliot Cohen LTC Conrad Crane (Ret), LTC Jan Horvath, and LTC John Nagl in *Military Review*

Written by some of the architects of the Surge, this article was one of the first calls for a revised, COIN-focused strategy in Iraq as well as for more troops to be sent there.

“The Battle for Sadr City” by James Kitfield in the *National Journal*

Written as the battle wound down, this examination provided much information about how the clash came about, how it was fought, and how it ended.

“Time for a New Strategy” by William McDonough in *Parameters*

This analysis, written after the battle concluded, brought forth how important it was to resetting the course Iraq was taking and the new, calmer, more secure, and better governed state of affairs that had manifested.

Newspaper Articles:

“19 Tense Hours in Sadr City Alongside the Mahdi Army: After Calm Year, Fighting Engulfs Shiite Enclave” by Sudarsan Raghavan in the *Washington Post*

An account by a reporter caught in the midst of the clash, this clearly describes the TTPs of both the US Army and JAM, in addition to detailing vividly the effects that the battle had on the residents of the district.

“A Shiite Militia in Baghdad Sees Its Power Wane” by Sabrina Tavernise in the *New York Times*

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This analysis details how JAM and Mr Sadr saw their influence decline as the Iraqi Government asserted its dominance and took full control of the country.

“A Tale of Three Cities by Stephen Farrell in the *New York Times*

This article looks at how three major Iraqi cities, including the Sadr City district of Baghdad were affected by the newly steeled resolve of the Iraqi Government in pursuing its campaign against the insurgents.

“How Prime Minister Maliki Pacified Iraq” by Kimberly Kagan and Frederick W Kagan, in the *Wall Street Journal*

“Maliki’s Victory” in the *Wall Street Journal*

“The New Reality in Iraq” by Frederick W Kagan, Kimberly Kagan, and Jack Keane in the *Wall Street Journal*

These Op-Ed pieces that appeared shortly after the conclusion of the battle, the authors showed how the battle had remade the situation in Iraq and also how the Iraqi Government finally summoned the resolve to act against the militias threatening its existence.

“The Last Battle” by Michael R Gordon in the *New York Times*

This account by a reporter who has covered the Iraq War extensively covers the build-up to the battle, as well as other factors that led to the changes in US military strategy that brought about its victory. Further, this analysis detailed some of the major power brokers on both sides of the conflict, and how each saw influence wane or wax as the situation morphed between 2003 and 2005 and then from 2006 through early 2008.

“The State of Iraq: An Update” and “The State of Iraq and Afghanistan” by Jason Campbell, Michael O’Hanlon, and Amy Unikewicz in the *New York Times*

A recurring feature on the Op-Ed page, these authors created a set of benchmarks and graphically exhibited the progress or lack thereof made in Iraq between 2005 and 2009. This

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was helpful in seeing how the resolution of this battle had far-reaching consequences down the road.

“US Role Deepens in Sadr City: Fierce Battle Against Shiite Militiamen Echoes First Years of War” by Amit R Paley in the *Washington Post*

This article looks into how the US military slowly usurped its Iraqi counterpart during the battle as the fighting became too much for the fledgling force of the latter.

Other Media:

60 Minutes- “How Technology Won Sadr City Battle”

An in-depth and extensive investigation of the role of UAVs in the fight and how the US is relying more on them to win battles and reduce collateral damage and civilian and US military casualties.

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